

Hamlet Studies

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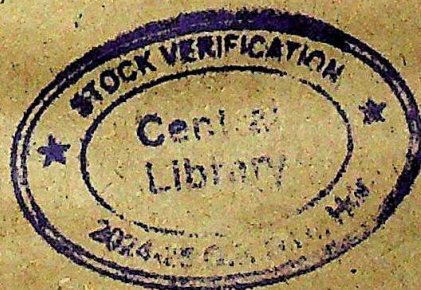


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HAMLET STUDIES

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Contributors to this Issue

CRAIG A. BERNTHAL is an attorney in the United States and is currently Assistant Director of Writing in the English Department at Michigan State University, where he is pursuing a Ph.D. He is interested in the influence of law and rhetoric on Renaissance Drama and is currently doing research on trial scenes in a number of Renaissance plays.

WILLIAM T. BETKEN has edited *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet* for Bardavon Books, Rhinebeck, New York. Copiously annotated with a running commentary, stage notes, and glossary, his editions have a sentence by sentence paraphrase in a modern English libretto, parallel to the original text. *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are the plays he will be working on next, in that order.

CLIFFORD DAVIDSON is Professor of English and Executive Editor of the Early Drama, Art, and Music project in the Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University. He is the author of numerous articles in various American and European journals and of several books, including a monograph on *Macbeth* (*The Primrose Way*, 1970). His most recent book is *From Creation to Doom: The York Cycle of Mystery Plays* (1984). He is also a co-editor of *Comparative Drama*.

ROBERT F. FLEISSNER has contributed articles and notes to *HSt*, vols. 1, 5, and 6. His most recent publication on *Hamlet* is a book-length study entitled *The Prince and the Professor: The Wittenberg Connection in Marlowe, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Frost—A Hamlet / Faust(us) Analogy* (Carl Winter Universitätsverlag Heidelberg, 1986).

PAUL GAUDET is Associate Professor and currently Chairman of Under-graduate Studies in the Department of English, the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of several articles on Shakespearean drama, primarily on Shakespeare's English History Plays. His present work is on the relationship between dramatic text and theatrical performance and on the nature of performance as "text."

W. HUTCHINGS' "A Review of Periodical Articles" appears annually in *HSt*. He recently participated in a lecture day-school on *Hamlet* held at the University of Manchester.

VERNON GARTH MILES is a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas specializing in 20th-century American literature. He has read papers on the Film versus the Novel at the Annual Meeting of the Popular Culture Association, and on John Barth and C.S. Lewis at the Christianity and Literature Section of the South Central MLA. His present paper on *Hamlet* is his first publication in print.

RONALD J. MILLER received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Washington State University in 1980 and is currently a sociology professor at Chandron State College, Nebraska. His specializations are Social Psychology and Urban Sociology. Author of *The Demolition of Skid Row* (D.C. Heath and Co., 1982), he is currently involved in research on skin potential and social psychological measures.

CLIFFORD J. RONAN, Professor of English at Southwest Texas State University, wrote on the *man* motif in *Hamlet* for *HSt*, vol. 4. His recent work on Shakespeare, Jonson, and Marlowe has appeared (or is forthcoming) in *Notes & Queries*, *Explicator*, *Classical and Modern Literature*, *Renaissance and Reformation*, and *Comparative Drama*.

VINOD SENA, Professor of English at the University of Delhi, has published articles on Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce in *Quest*, *Literary Criticism*, *Southern Review*, *Dublin Magazine*, and *Modern Drama*. His book, *The Poet as Critic: W.B. Yeats on Poetry, Drama, and Tradition*, was published by Macmillan in 1980.

SUSAN SNYDER, author of *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1979) [rev. *HSt*, vol. 4], teaches at Swarthmore College. She is a member of the Editorial Board of *Shakespeare Quarterly*.

J.J.M. TOBIN, Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, is the author of *Shakespeare's Favorite Novel: A Study of 'The Golden Asse' as Prime Source* (University Press of America, 1984). His articles and notes on *Hamlet* have appeared in *HSt*, *N&Q*, *AN&Q*, *Archiv*, and elsewhere.

MARGUERITE M. VEY-MILLER has been active in neuroscience research for the past eight years in the Departments of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and is presently engaged in independent research in neuropsychology at Chadron State College, Chadron, Nebraska. Her current investigation of "Bilingualism and lateralization of the brain" is supported by the Chadron State College Research Institute and The High Plains Center. She is also a graduate student in Literature. Her previous publications have been in *Neurology* and *Neuroscience Abstracts*.

R.S. WHITE, lecturer in English at the University of Newcastle on Tyne, has published *Shakespeare and the Romance Ending* (Newcastle on Tyne, 1981), "*Let Wonder Seem Familiar*": *Endings in Shakespeare's Romance Vision* (Athlone Press, 1985), *Innocent Victims: Poetic Injustice in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Athlone Press, 1982 and 1985), and numerous articles in such journals as *Shakespeare Survey* and *Review of English Studies*.

ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR. is a frequent contributor to *HSt* (vols. 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6). He is Professor of English and Chairman of the Department at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Comments and Announcements

On looking for a strand that runs through all of the four articles in the present volume, it seems to me that this exists in the endeavour to project a Hamlet who transcends the dilemma in which he finds himself. Nietzsche, in a well known passage from *The Birth of Tragedy*, argued that Hamlet's inaction arises not from irresolution or uncertainty, but because he *knows* too much. Hamlet is not a victim of his circumstances.

... the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have for once penetrated into the true nature of things,—they have *perceived*, but it is irksome for them to act; for their action cannot change the elemental nature of things; the time is out of joint and they regard it as shameful or ridiculous that they should be required to set it right. Knowledge kills action, action requires the veil of illusion—it is this lesson which Hamlet teaches and not the idle wisdom of John-o'-never Dreams who from too much reflection, from a surplus of possibilities, arrives at action at all. Not reflection, no!—true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, preponderate over all motives inciting to action, in Hamlet . . .

Each of the articles in this volume of *Hamlet Studies* shows us a Hamlet who is in different ways superior to his situation. R.S. White sees in Hamlet one who uses humour to distance himself from a situation in which he is unwillingly placed. If throughout the play Hamlet's witticisms are a defence against spying, scheming, and betrayal, in the graveyard scene Hamlet and the grave-digger meet on equal terms, so to speak, and Hamlet faces his own inevitable death with wry acceptance. During this encounter Hamlet's memory goes back to the aura of fun and merriment in the court during the time of the old king when the prince was seven and Yorick was the jester. The bonhomie of those days has vanished, except for Hamlet in whom it lives on.

Vernon Garth Miles argues that Hamlet is caught between the pull of Catholicism and Puritanism, with the latter prevailing. Hamlet, in some sense, represents man, devoid of free will and depraved, caught in the trap of determinism versus humanism. And yet, despite Hamlet's

inability to achieve integration, to escape the conflicting claims of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Miles gives Hamlet the accolade for refusing to yield without a struggle. In the twentieth century we admire Hamlet because he makes the attempt.

In "Self-Examination and Readiness in Hamlet" Craig A. Bernthal gives us a Hamlet who moves from anguish and self-doubt to the equipoise of one able to forget his 'self' in the sword fight with Laertes. Hamlet 'loses' himself in the duel and, as a consequence, emerges with a more powerful identity. He does not want to die with a wounded name. He retains his pride.

Laertes' pronouncement, "He is justly served," on the death of Claudius is the starting point for Paul Gaudet to trace the progressive build-up of feelings within us, as spectators, leading to this utterance. Laertes' exoneration of Hamlet at the play's end coincides with the moment when our moral censure of Hamlet is obliterated by our emotional acquittal of him. Thus, though Hamlet may be tainted by the dram of evil, our feelings towards him are divided. Our mingled responses towards the protagonist are an index to the complexity of his composition.

* * *

The second part of Prem Nath's article "*Hamlet* in the Eighteenth Century, 1750-1799," that was to have appeared in this volume, got delayed and has therefore been postponed. Readers will recall that the first part was published in volume 6 (1984).

* * *

The Folger Institute's programme of seminars and evening colloquia for 1986-87 is as follows:

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N.T. Phillipson, University of Edinburgh

THE NOVEL AND SOCIAL CHANGE: DEFOE TO AUSTEN

John J. Richetti, Rutgers University

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R.W.D.

The Spirit of Yorick, Or the Tragic Sense of Humour in *Hamlet*

R. S. WHITE

From his very first line Hamlet signals to the audience that he will use humour to defy and distance himself from a situation in which he is unwillingly placed:

King.

But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son —

Hamlet. [*Aside*] A little more than kin, and less than kind.

(1.2.64-5)¹

Whether we describe Hamlet's aside as a factual statement or as the kind of "quibble" that got Shakespeare into trouble with Johnson² we must at least admit an intellectual cleverness with words, a capacity for witty conundrum which rarely deserts the character even in the most dangerous of situations. In this essay, I shall examine the nature, variety and circumstances of Hamlet's "jokes" in order to discover their function in the play as a whole. The existence in a tragedy of a protagonist who can be a wit, mimic, practical joker and clown constitutes first a generic problem which Ben Jonson recognized in his famous criticism of Shakespeare: "His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too. Many times hee fell into those things, could not escape laughter."³ Moments of "comic relief" against the decorum of a tragedy would offend Jonson seriously enough, but at least they could be excised without damage to the narrative. How much more dangerously, however, could the dramatist undermine the tragic tone by giving us an inescapably comic hero whose lines delivered in a characteristic tone can-

¹Quotations from Shakespeare follow the Peter Alexander text (London: Collins, 1951).

²Preface to Johnson's edition of Shakespeare (1765):

A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures A quibble, poor and barren as it is . . . was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it.

³From *Timber: or, Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter* (pub. 1641), quoted in *Shakespeare Criticism 1623-1840*, ed. D. Nichol Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1916).

not be omitted without cutting the play to virtual non-existence? From the example cited by Jonson, a "ridiculous" non-sequiter by Julius Caesar, it seems clear that it is the existence of a more subtle and persistent kind of wit to which he is objecting, and it is the very kind that runs through *Hamlet* like a golden chain.

The court of Claudius could not really afford an official jester, first because anybody who spoke the truth in however comic a vein would be dangerous to the assassin-king's position but also because such a figure would risk upstaging or being upstaged by the young prince himself. We discover that it was not always so in the court of Denmark from a beautifully placed "inset"⁴ as Hamlet finds the skull of Yorick in the grave dug for Ophelia:

Clown. A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

Hamlet. This?

Clown. E'en that.

Hamlet. Let me see. [*Takes the skull*] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning — quite chap-fall'n? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that.

(5.1.178-90)

The sequence in which this exchange takes place has many functions. It tells us, amongst other things, that Hamlet is now thirty years of age and that Yorick died when the prince was seven. It evokes a nostalgic glimpse of the fun and games when Hamlet was a child and must indirectly provide the source and model for his own irrepressible sense of humour. The feeling grows during the speech that although Yorick's merriment lives on in Hamlet, yet it died in the rest of the court on the death of the old King. In Claudius's court a sense of humour is simply inappropriate or even offensive. Finally, and most pertinently, the occa-

⁴As a term of criticism, "inset" was established by Francis Berry in *The Shakespearean Inset* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

The Spirit of Yorick

sion stirs in Hamlet a realisation of the biggest joke of all, that the fact of mortality is so absurd in itself that attempting to disguise it with cosmetics is trivial and pointless. Hamlet goes on to muse whimsically on the possibility that Alexander, returned to the earth, may now stop a bung-hole in a barrel. The deepest perception Hamlet provides us with here is that humour may be peculiarly close to an awareness of death and tragedy, an assumption that lies behind many of his own comic strategies as he tries, in the words of another Shakespearean character, "To move wild laughter in the throat of death."⁵ Raleigh, in words set to music by Orlando Gibbons sees death as the end of a play which is no comedy:

Thus march we playing to our latest rest,
Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.⁶

But, says Hamlet, it may be a jest if we choose to see it as such. Any pretensions to status, beauty or fame are implicitly ridiculed by the fact of non-existence. Hamlet is articulating something which has been intuitively known by all the great comic masters from Rabelais to the Marx Brothers. The comic perspective is profoundly subversive, anti-authoritarian and anarchic. Hamlet's own responses to the experiences depicted in the play consistently spring from such an awareness.

The main motives behind his wit may be stated summarily and illustrated at leisure:

- (1) a strategy of evasion;
- (2) camouflaging the self;
- (3) a revelation of Hamlet's own repressed fears and insecurities;
- (4) good-humoured sociability expressing innocent enjoyment;
- (5) humour as a way of perceiving or coping with tragic awareness.

Each of these impulses has found theoretical authority in later analysts of the comic from Meredith to Freud, and some reference will be made to the ideas of such writers. The investigation undertaken here will, it is hoped, add to our understanding of the play and to our concept of the place of wit and comedy on a more theoretical level.

I

Hamlet finds himself in an impossibly compromised position from the very start of the play. Spies are hired to extract from him how much

⁵Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*, V.ii.843.

⁶From "What is our life? . . ."

he knows about what is going on in the state; the most senior courtier, Polonius, is delegated to shadow him; and he faces more than one plot to assassinate him. In the meantime Hamlet himself, without the resources of the state to help him and without recourse to official justice since he realizes the corruption at the source of the machinery, must also attempt to spy out the truth behind official lies and cover-ups. Whilst needing to bide his time in order to unravel the truth, he realizes also that time is his most precious and uncertain commodity. In these circumstances, calculated evasion is not only a political strategy; it is necessary for Hamlet's very survival. Wit is his most characteristic form of evasion.

At various points in the play Shakespeare adopts a clear set of structural parallels, so that we know, broadly speaking, what will happen in the narrative and our real interest lies in Hamlet's own, often surprising, responses. 2.1 shows us that Polonius is not simply the bluff, fussy but lovable father solicitous for his children's welfare that we had seen earlier. He is hiring Reynaldo (a name with associations of the fox) to spy on his son Laertes, and he is quite specific in his instructions which are designed to reveal his son's sins and follies whilst abroad. Immediately afterwards in scene 2 we discover that Claudius equally is not quite the courteous and caring father although his political diplomacy manifests itself in this tone. He too is setting spies on his 'son' to find out whether the source of "Hamlet's transformation" is explained only by the death of his natural father. The implication is that Claudius suspects something more which may be dangerous to himself. Claudius then finds another willing agent of espionage in the practised Polonius who, fearing the consequences of Hamlet's infatuation with Ophelia, offers to gather information about the prince's feelings. Our interest is now aroused in how Hamlet will cope with these two sets of spies even before he knows their mission, and the remainder of 2.2 shows us his encounters with first Polonius and then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Whether out of dislike or suspicion, Hamlet parries Polonius with what can be seen as either erratic, 'mad' behaviour or as a string of deflectionary witticisms, and even Polonius glimpses the second possibility:

Hamlet. Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum; and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams—all of which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for you yourself, sir, shall grow

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old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward.
Polonius [*Aside*] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't
 —Will you walk out of the air, my lord?
Hamlet. Into my grave?
Polonius. Indeed, that's out of the air. [*Aside*] How pregnant sometimes his replies are!

(2.2.195-208)

The "method" employed by Hamlet no doubt owes something to his training in philosophy for he is pondering the nature of the "tactful lie" and cleverly reversing the processes of time. The intention, however, is to bewilder Polonius, to ridicule mildly the courtier's invasion of his privacy, and fundamentally to give nothing away about himself. When he meets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his tone is quite different, and again the kind of humour he employs is a guide to his responses. He greets the two men "in the beaten way of friendship" (2.2.268), sharing with them an easy and informal banter:

Hamlet. My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern?
 Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?
Rosencrantz. As the indifferent children of the earth.
Guildenstern. Happy in that we are not over-happy;
 On fortune's cap we are not the very button.
Hamlet. Nor the soles of her shoe?
Rosencrantz. Neither, my lord.
Hamlet. Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?
Guildenstern. Faith, her privates we.
Hamlet. In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true; she is a strumpet . . .

(2.2.222-34)

The jokes here are probably typical of many male undergraduates, playing cleverly upon a conceit with a mildly daring obscenity, the tone of the conversation between Dedalus and Lynch in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. There is even a little dose of seriousness in Hamlet's last comment, as he draws the conceit closer to his own recent experiences. The interest in the course that follows is that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are able to maintain the metaphysical wit but Hamlet, pleading that he "cannot reason," becomes more serious. At this stage it is perhaps the evasiveness of their joking tone, the very tactics used

by Hamlet in parrying Polonius, which raises his suspicions as to the real motive behind their apparently pointless visit. After extracting from them the confession that they were "sent for" and having divined that they are delegated to spy on him, Hamlet's suspicious wariness is manifested in the way he bristles at even the possibility of a joke against himself:

Hamlet. . . . Man delights not me—no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Rosencrantz. My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

Hamlet. Why did ye laugh, then, when I said "Man delights not me"?

(2.2.307-12)

Throughout this lengthy and important scene, then, Shakespeare employs an intellectual wit which, first from Hamlet and then from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, becomes a strategy for evading honest statement.

II

It is a short step from using wit to evade self-revelation to using it more actively as a camouflage for one's true feelings. As the threats to Hamlet mount he takes this step, and different forms of jokes become an habitual response to people who demand some explanation for his behaviour. He is quite conscious of what he is doing, and he bases his strategy upon what amounts to a theory of identity as it exists in a social context. In 3.2 immediately after the "mousetrap" scene, Hamlet uses jokes aggressively to refuse serious engagement with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

Guildenstern. The King, sir—

Hamlet. Ay, sir, what of him?

Guildenstern. Is, in his retirement, marvellous distemper'd.

Hamlet. With drink, sir?

Guildenstern. No, my Lord, rather with choler.

Hamlet. Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to his doctor; for for me to put him into his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far more choler.

Guildenstern. Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.

(3.2.292-301)

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Hamlet's suspicion has hardened into a reflexive flippancy which from this stage onwards he adopts towards everybody except his mother and Horatio. It clearly hurts Rosencrantz and offends his code of friendship, but when he reproaches Hamlet the latter seizes the opportunity of the entry of the Players with recorders to turn on both men:

Hamlet. . . . Will you play upon this pipe?

Guildenstern. My lord, I cannot.

Hamlet. I pray you.

Guildenstern. Believe me, I cannot.

Hamlet. I do beseech you.

Guildenstern. I know no touch of it, my lord.

Hamlet. It is as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

Guildenstern. But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony. I have not the skill.

Hamlet. Why look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be play'd on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.

(3.2.341-60)

The masterly control of the conceit is equal to anything in the metaphysical wit of John Donne and it comes close to explaining explicitly Hamlet's understanding of the relationship between the self and his society. Beset by spies, both amateur and professional (Polonius immediately re-enters), whilst personally engaged in a search for the truth about the devious Claudius, Hamlet is keenly aware of the necessity to "lie" without being caught out, and to manipulate events and extract information in a reciprocally devious way. Oscar Wilde, an equally threatened person, sums up the idea in one of his celebrated sayings from *Lady Windermere's Fan*:

Nowadays to be intelligible is to be found out.

Identity for Hamlet has become something which one can consciously withhold, and which can, if one is careless or unwary, be extracted by

a skilled operator as easily as a tune from a recorder in the hands of a musician. Rather than employing the political deviousness and calculated lies of Claudius in camouflaging the truth of his identity, Hamlet chooses to maintain his mystery and his integrity by the judicious use of jokes. In time he will come to despise Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for their incapacity to learn the same lesson, for being exploited and manipulated by Claudius like a "sponge" which can be squeezed dry of information (4.2.10-20). In his eyes their fault is not only spying but a prostitution of their identities to expedient ends.

In his confrontation with Claudius after murdering Polonius, Hamlet draws upon a whole repertoire of comic tactics in lines which, despite the blackness of their humour, can draw laughs from an audience in the theatre:

King. Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet. At supper.

King. At supper! Where?

Hamlet. Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten; a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.

King. Alas, alas!

Hamlet. A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

King. What dost thou mean by this?

Hamlet. Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

King. Where is Polonius?

Hamlet. In heaven; send thither to see; if your messenger find him not there, seek him i'th' other place yourself. But if, indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

(4.3.17-37)

Anybody who would wish to argue that the gravedigger with his particular kind of 'grave' humour represents an isolated piece of 'comic relief' in the play would do well to ponder Hamlet's answers, for he employs the same macabre whimsicality. It is much more accurate to say that the Gravedigger merely continues a strain which runs through the whole work and is carried essentially by its hero. Ironically, it is only

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when these two characters meet by the graveside that Hamlet finds a true equal, one who employs humour with the same ironic and sardonic detachment. In this sense their meeting may be socially significant also, for there is much talk throughout the play about the privilege of the court weighed against the common people, the King against the beggar, whereas mortality dictates equality in the grave. Hamlet, something of a 'people's prince' (4.3.4-7) and the Gravedigger are the two who recognize that all will eventually provide work for the latter and a meal for the worms. Of course, however, in his exchange with Claudius Hamlet is not playing gratuitously with metaphysical conceits, nor is he making a statement about democracy. He is threatening the King since his reference to fishing can most pertinently be interpreted in the light of Hamlet's successful baiting of Claudius with the "mousetrap" play. The broad point to be made is that Hamlet is using jokes here to camouflage both his political intentions and his true feelings. That he does have feelings about the death of Polonius is clear from a reported gesture:

Queen.

O'er whom his very madness, like some ore
Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure: 'a weeps for what is done.

(4.1.25-7)

Just as Hamlet is the one who consistently jokes, he is also the only character to cry, a perfect instance of Byron's paradox,

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
'Tis that I may not weep.⁷

For Hamlet laughing may be a social necessity and weeping must be a private affair for it reveals too much.

III

On the other hand, if we ourselves maintain a distance from the variety of self-images which Hamlet is projecting in order to protect his real self, we may find that his humour reveals as much as it conceals about his own doubts, latent insecurities and repressed fears. The area of the play in which this operates most clearly is his relationship with Ophelia, where general fears about women which he can seriously express to his mother are revealed obliquely through his jokes to Ophelia.

⁷*Don Juan*, Canto, the Fourth, Stanza iv.

Both Gertrude and Ophelia pose a more confusing and disquieting threat to the young man, for it is sexual and unintended rather than political and calculated. His wit is at its cruellest, most caustic and most indirect when he turns on the innocent, though manipulable Ophelia. As they watch the play-within-a-play described by Hamlet as a comedy, he is himself in jocular mood, but barbs lie behind his words:

Hamlet. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

[*Lying down at Ophelia's feet*]

Ophelia. No, my lord.

Hamlet. I mean, my head upon your lap.

Ophelia. Ay, my lord.

Hamlet. Do you think I meant country matters?

Ophelia. I think nothing, my lord.

Hamlet. That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs.

Ophelia. What is, my lord?

Hamlet. Nothing.

Ophelia. You are merry, my lord.

Hamlet. Who, I?

Ophelia. Ay, my lord.

Hamlet. O God, your only jig-maker! What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within's two hours.

(3.2.108-22)

The last line returns Hamlet to his "hobby-horse," the remarriage of his mother only two months after his father's death, and although his tone is ironic and lighthearted there is a deadly serious import behind the words. It is the same tone, expressive of his damaged sensibility, which had informed his explanation to Horatio of the rapid marriage:

Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak'd meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

(1.2.180-1)

As for the sexual innuendos to Ophelia, one could explain these on various grounds. One could see them as the nervous ploy of a man wishing to make sexual overtures but limiting himself to a safe, verbal distance.⁸ Depending on one's reading of Ophelia's character it might be

⁸The analysis at this point owes its terms of reference to Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), translated by James Strachey (1960), quoted here from the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, 1976).

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possible to see her collaborating in the game:⁹

Ophelia. You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

Hamlet. I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

Ophelia. You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

Hamlet. It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.

Ophelia. Still better, and worse.

Hamlet. So you mis-take your husbands.

(3.2.240-5)

But such explanations are much too innocent to find the heart of what is going on. There is too much genuine resistance on Ophelia's part to regard her as participating equally or willingly. If a woman understands a male-based sexual pun this does not mean that she totally approves of it, and besides she has an obligation to be courteous to and even humour the future heir to the throne, particularly when she has cause to think he may be mad. At the same time, there is much that points to deeper causes for Hamlet's levity. His jokes are persistent and, in Freud's term, "aggressive" to a marked degree. They are geared to reducing the woman to a mere sexual object, obsessed with "country matters" and existing only for the man's gratification whilst also being unfaithful in marriage. The root of Hamlet's wit here is his second "hobby-horse," a neurotic resentment and fear of female vitality and a deep suspicion of female sexuality. Of course, his mother's re-marriage is the link between the two obsessions.

Freud in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* has many of his most interesting observations to make on the form of wit practised by Hamlet in this scene, and it is a shame that he does not use the play for his examples instead of the rather obscure jokes which he does refer to. (Freud does use *Hamlet* on several occasions, but always to advance his notion that economy is essential to jokes, in short that "brevity is the soul of wit" as Polonius puts it.¹⁰) In developing his theories of the purposes of "tendentious," obscene jokes, Freud makes the following statements:

Smut is like the exposure of the sexually different person to whom it is directed. By the utterance of the obscene words it compels the per-

⁹See Freud, pp. 140 ff.

¹⁰This, incidentally, seems one of Freud's favourite Shakespearean quotations, judging from the frequency of its occurrence in *Jokes*.

son who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or the procedure in question and shows her that the assailant is himself imagining it.¹¹

The repressive activity of civilization brings it about that primary possibilities of enjoyment, which have now, however, been repudiated by the censorship in us, are lost to us. But to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost.¹²

The former could be taken as a fairly accurate description of the tactics of Hamlet's jokes to Ophelia, whether he is conscious or unconscious of using them in this way. The word "assailant" is a good one in the context. The latter statement has its use in pointing us towards the notion of repression which may be liberated through a joke and which is certainly appropriate in the context. Where one might question Freud is in his assumption that this particular kind of liberation is a healthy one pointing to "enjoyment." It would be more fair to the woman in the case to say that what Hamlet reveals of his subconscious mind is a level of irrational prejudice, bitterness and a deep fear of women. The fact that Freud tends always to assume that it is men who make obscene jokes does not inspire him to question the one-sidedness and dubious nature of the "enjoyable" (?) process which reinforces a restrictive and demeaning attitude towards women. He would have been on more solid ground if he had stuck to his other suggestion that jokes are often designed to be either actively or potentially offensive to their subject-matter. Certainly, what we glean from Hamlet's jokes to Ophelia in this scene are attitudes which are much more questionable and less healthy than elsewhere in the play.

IV

We may be grateful that at some rare points in the play Hamlet is given respite from the public pressures upon him and he can relax into more genial mood. On these occasions his humour is that of "an honest method, as wholesome as sweet" (2.2.440), without barbs or sophistry. When he meets the Players (2.2) his mood is so generously expansive that he even instructs them in private not to "mock" Polonius (2.2.538), although he is still not above mildly ridiculing the old courtier himself:

¹¹Freud, p. 141.

¹²Freud, p. 145.

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21

*The Spirit of Yorick**Polonius.* This is too long.*Hamlet.* It shall to the barber's, with your beard. Prithee say on.

He's for a jig, or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps.

(2.2.491-3)

Compared with many of his other comments this at least holds the merit of a robust directness which could even pass for affectionate banter. There is even a split second of intimate agreement between Hamlet and Polonius when the latter appears to be moved by the tears in the actor's eyes (2.2.512-13). Hamlet's *bonhomie* and high spirits caused by the arrival of the Players is expressed in his instructions to Polonius:

... Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed? Do you hear: let them be well used; for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time; after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

(2.2.516-19)

Hamlet's spirits are raised by the Players for various reasons. They are old friends, old colleagues, and even if they too have been "sent for" to entertain the grieving prince, he obviously does not suspect so. They do indeed divert him and come to be used by him in his testing of Claudius's conscience. More important, however, there lies between Hamlet and the actors a special affinity because what to them is a public profession is to him a private necessity, playing roles, being within the flow of passing time at the court whilst maintaining a distance from it. Their presence and particular skills also give him an opportunity for reflecting on his own predicament, on seeing that imagined or acted grief is more effective than his own truly felt misery which exists without show. His own attention is focussed upon the role of the clown:

And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.

(3.2.36 ff.)

Even in this warning there may be a degree of self-consideration, for Hamlet no doubt realizes that at the court of Elsinore he is himself play-

ing the fool's part, speaking truth in riddles and deflating reputations with a joke, at the possible expense of neglecting more serious and "necessary" questions. By and large, the presence of the Players may be said to occasion in Hamlet a lightening of the spirits which motivates such innocent jokes as telling the boy actor not to let his voice crack, whilst also allowing him to meditate at a safe distance upon the nature of play-acting which he is personally involved in. The only other character who is able to bring out such an agreeable side of Hamlet's laughter is his loyal friend Horatio. In ridiculing the young, affected Osric (3 2. 80 ff.) the whole point of the humour is that for once Hamlet is not indulging in purely private jokes but sharing them with an appreciative and sympathetic auditor:

Horatio. This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

(5.2.181)

Such infrequent moments between Hamlet and Horatio represent the central nature of jokes as analysed by Freud, that they should ideally be shared in a form of collaboration with another person present, at the expense of a third who may be present or absent.¹³ The fact that Hamlet lacks such a collaborator for most of the time, unless we can include a sympathetic audience in such a role, means that his jokes are usually bitter, barren and potentially a source for a true madness identical to the one he is feigning, since they mark his alienation from any version of 'reality' shared with other characters. "Being thus benetted round with villainies" (5.2.29), Hamlet is granted moments of relaxed and sociable good humour with the players and Horatio, a mode which we suspect is more congenial and unforced than the wit he employs as a response to the dangers he faces.

V

Hamlet's soliloquies are singularly devoid of humour when compared with many of his other utterances. Presumably it would hold little function when, in self-communion, he is not disguising his feelings in an assumed role nor sharing his observations with a sympathetic friend. We do, however, find in them a mode of perception which informs other statements when we find Hamlet exercising a peculiarly fundamental form of humour about the ironies to be observed in the fact of death.

¹³Freud, p. 141.

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For we find that in the soliloquies he is acutely aware in a somewhat whimsical way of the large discrepancies between conduct and existence.

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!

(1.2.129-30)

could be the starting-point for one of Donne's more grim conceits, an equivalent to his use of the image of the shortest day in "A Nocturnal Upon S. Lucy's Day," a wryly metaphysical comparison between human existence and a block of ice. The observation in itself is potentially playful and ingenious although the tone is developed in a melancholy direction towards the attractions of suicide in a "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" world (1.2.133). The comparison between the authenticity of the actor's feigned grief and Hamlet's inability to express or act upon his feelings (2.2.542 ff.) once again turns upon a potentially comic insight into his role as ineffectual clown, a "muddy-mettl'd rascal" whose behaviour is likened to a "John-a-dreams." If there were not at least the latent capacity for finding a comic perspective on experience, we should not find in Hamlet's language the explicit hint of ridicule: he would bear more resemblance to his humourless and solemnly headstrong foil, Laertes. The economy of his reduction of human existence to a "quintessence of dust" argues for the same, unique sensibility (2.2.307), as does the unexpected conceit involved in comparing after-life to a sleep full of bad dreams (3.1.64-8). In his final soliloquy (4.4.32-66), with sombreness touched with intellectual alertness, Hamlet exploits the ridiculousness of notions like fame and honour which may be won in slaughtering an army over a worthless piece of ground whilst private grievances of more substance go unvoiced and unrecompensed. In all these meditations Hamlet is revealing an unmined vein of the professional fool's humour dwelling upon the paradoxes, contradictions and sheer follies involved in human pretentiousness when judged with disrespect for person and power against the levelling neutrality of death. Such a point of view is close to the satirist of any temper from the lightness of Horace to the savagery of Swift, based upon a distance described in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*:

It's hardly believable how much laughter, sport and fun you poor mortals can provide the gods every day. For they allocate their sober morning hours to settling altercations and listening to prayers, but once the nectar is flowing freely they want a change from serious

business, and that is when they settle down on some promontory of heaven and lean over to watch the goings-on of mankind, a show they enjoy more than anything. Heavens, what a farce it is, what a motley crowd of fools!¹⁴

Hamlet is far too closely involved in the mortal plots to enjoy the "laughter, sport and fun" of observing disinterestedly, but the moral authority of his observations takes its strength from a resistance to complete absorption in the pettiness of men's affairs. It is external events rather than temperamental qualities which prevent the nectar flowing freely for him.

We find ourselves returned again to that most central image in the play, a prince and a Clown by the side of a freshly dug grave, contemplating a skull which turns out to be that of the King's jester some twenty-three years before. The inner irony is that the prince could well be the clown as the skull might belong to anybody, for station in life becomes an irrelevance in death:

Hamlet. That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if 'twere Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder! This might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'erreaches; one that would circumvent God, might it not?

Horatio. It might, my lord.

Hamlet. Or of a courtier; which could say 'Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, sweet lord?' This might be my Lord Such-a-one, that praised my Lord Such-a-one's horse, when 'a meant to beg it—might it not?

Horatio. Ay, my lord.

Hamlet. Why, e'en so; and now my Lady Worm's, chapless, and knock'd about the mazard with a sexton's spade. Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggats with them? Mine ache to think on't.

1 Clown. [*Sings*] A pick-axe and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet:
O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

[*Throws up another skull*]

Hamlet. There's another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures,

¹⁴Quoted from the Penguin edition, translated Betty Radice (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 141.

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and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery?

(5.1.75-95)

And so Hamlet goes on, to be joined by the droll gravedigger who "lies" in his own grave, ringing the changes upon the multiple ironies which follow from the arrival of "this fell sergeant Death" who is so "strict in his arrest" (5.2.328-9). The scene in the churchyard, far from being an isolated moment of 'comic relief' clarifies and integrates a tone and mode of reasoning which has run consistently through the play, emanating mainly from its central character. The wry acceptance and fatalism which come to inform Hamlet's attitude towards his own inevitable death are learned through whimsy and conceits, confirmed at the moment when the nets are tightest around him:

Hamlet. . . . we defy augury: there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man owes of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

(5.2.211-15)

By dealing with the stuff of darkest fears by way of humour and comic strategies Hamlet has faced and accepted his own death, a fact which gives the moment when it comes a serenity rare for the tragic protagonist in Shakespeare:

Hamlet.

O God! Horatio, what a wounded name.
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

.

—the rest is silence.

Horatio. Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

(5.2.356-62)

I hope that I have done something towards healing the "wounded name" of Hamlet which has been propagated by generations of critics. He is not the lugubrious neurotic, wracked by melancholy and *angst*.¹⁵ From start to finish in the play Hamlet is Horatio's "sweet prince," perhaps even the "sweet and wittie soule of Ovid" which Meres found in Shakespeare himself, full of quips and sallies, yearning for a time of relaxed enjoyment of humour, yet able with a grave joke to turn even death into a paradox. To say so much is to fundamentally change our way of discussing the "problem" of *Hamlet*. It does not lie in the personality of Hamlet nor the dramatist, a "disease" which T.S. Eliot has proposed in an influential travesty of the play.¹⁶ Indeed, Hamlet himself has a sublimely healthy psyche in dealing with appalling circumstances. The 'problem' lies instead in the conditions under which Hamlet is forced to operate, the outer circumstances with which he must cope. In a court which runs on intrigue and assassination, headed by a corrupt regicide whose existence pollutes the source of state justice, and in a society which interferes with even his most intimate experience of love for a woman, Hamlet demonstrates qualities of political acumen and personal integrity by evading the traps laid for him and gradually uncovering a truth which the state has officially veiled. Hamlet's triumph is the pyrrhic victory of the comic principle itself. Though laughter in itself may not change the world, its generous gift is to retrieve sense and meaning, a consolatory ordering of experience, in circumstances where reason and expedience are woefully inadequate at best, deeply threatening at worst.¹⁷

¹⁵One of the strongest modern statements of this attitude occurs in G. Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Methuen, 1930), although in the later edition of this work Knight admits to some "exaggeration" in his earlier essay (fourth edition, London, 1949). Although my view is rather different, I owe much to Knight's powerful interpretations, and find his phrase "Hamlet's macabre originality" very suggestive. For a recent, interesting analysis of the more "attractive" qualities of Hamlet, see E.A.J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies. The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response* (London: Macmillan, 1976). Between the two views lies a whole spectrum of attitudes adopted by a host of critics who are (in the cliché) "too numerous to mention."

¹⁶T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1932).

¹⁷In dealing with such a wide subject, I am aware that other writers have recognised the centrality of humour in *Hamlet*. See specially David Pirie, "Hamlet without the Prince" in *Shakespeare's Wide and Universal Stage*, edited C.B. Cox and D.J. Palmer (Manchester, 1984); Jean Macintyre, "Hamlet and the Comic Heroine," *Hamlet Studies*, 4 (1982), 6-18; and Michael Graves, "Hamlet as Fool," *Hamlet Studies*, 4 (1982), 72-88. I am indebted to the knowledge these writers have given me.

Hamlet's Search for Philosophic Integration: A Twentieth-Century View

VERNON GARTH MILES

It seems natural to begin a discussion of *Hamlet* with the idea of tension-producing contrasts. Hamlet contrasts with Claudius, with Laertes, with Horatio, and with Fortinbras. Ophelia contrasts with Gertrude; the Ghost that is, even contrasts with the King Hamlet that was. But encompassing all of these contrasts, while being embodied by them, is the contrast of philosophy, of world view, that we find in the play. This tension of world view can be seen most easily by examining the tension between what I will here call Classical humanistic optimism and evangelical Protestant determinism. These terms are adopted (and adapted) from Douglas Bush who, in *The Renaissance and English Humanism*, uses similar terms in his discussion of the differing world views of Desiderius Erasmus (the Classical humanist) and Martin Luther (the evangelical Protestant).¹

In this discussion of the contrasting world views of Erasmus and Luther, Professor Bush refers to a treatise on the freedom of the will which Erasmus penned as an answer to Luther, and in doing so defines both Luther's determinism and Erasmus' optimism:

When Erasmus did finally speak out against Luther, it was in a treatise on the freedom of the will. If this seemed an oddly academic subject to propound at such a time, Luther knew better; he said Erasmus had taken him by the throat. The episode dramatizes the fundamental contrast between the fervent Augustinian monk, who denies freewill and maintains predestination, total depravity, and salvation by grace alone, and the half-Pelagian humanist whose hopes for religious and cultural betterment are based on faith in man's rational self-direction and essential goodness.

(Bush, p. 66)²

¹Douglas Bush, *The Renaissance and English Humanism* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1939), pp. 60-68.

²Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), however pro-Erasmus he may be, adeptly describes the tension in Europe during the early years of the Reformation, naming the "treatise" *De libero arbitrio diatribe* (*A Disquisition upon Free Will*) and Luther's answer as *De servo arbitrio* (*On the Will not free*), pp. 161-65.

We see in Bush's comment that both evangelical Protestant determinism and Classical humanistic optimism are terms dealing with how one perceives the world and especially how one perceives man's place in it.

But what do humanistic optimism and Protestant determinism have to do with Tudor England in general and with *Hamlet* in particular? Bush, tracing humanism from its European background, names Gröcyn, Colet, More, Lily and others as representing "the character of English humanism in its first maturity, a thoroughly religious and ethical character which had its Catholic and Protestant phases and then passed into such divergent channels as learned puritanism and Cambridge Platonism" (p. 71). From a more historical perspective, Bush places the Catholic and Protestant phases as following the death of Henry VIII, saying that "after the short and troubled reigns of Edward and Mary, came the accession of Elizabeth, the return of the Marian exiles, and the beginning of strife between Anglican and Puritan. All along, of course, English Catholicism created unceasing difficulties" (p. 74). *Hamlet*, penned at the crossroads of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was written at a time when the tension between humanistic optimism (Anglicanism) and Protestant determinism (Puritanism) was at its height, at a time when the Catholic phase of humanism was slowly giving way to the more morbid Protestant phase.

Inherent in this Protestant phase of "humanism" (I place it in quotation marks here because I am not sure if we can rightfully call it humanism in the truest sense of the word) is the idea that man is void of free will, totally depraved, and caught in a philosophic quandary. Bush sums up this seventeenth-century situation very nicely:

The Christian humanist of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance knew the inward things essential for the good life and what he did not know about the outer or even the inner world did not matter. For the seventeenth-century man both the outer and the inner world have become oppressively vast and dark, and the great question is "What do I know?" Such a condensed contrast only means that various disruptive forces, while in operation centuries earlier, have in England become conspicuous in the seventeenth century.

(pp. 80-81)

Bush rightly negates the idea that with the ascension of James I everyone suddenly became deterministic. But while it is true that philosophic progression is slow and sometimes painful, it is not invisible. Written at the intersection of two centuries and of two world views, *Hamlet* represents Shakespeare's attempt to synthesize the two centuries, and

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more importantly, to display the tension between these two world views in the person of his title character, the Prince of Denmark.

In his discussion of the tensions among Stoicism, the courtly tradition, and what he calls "the Christian-humanistic attitude toward life," Hiram Haydn emphasizes the idea that while Hamlet "seeks" revenge he must first find philosophic "integration" or synthesis:

On the level of external action, he is seeking honorable, just revenge; on the level of philosophical orientation, he is searching for *integration—a condition in which word and action may become one, with a mind at peace*. And because, until he attains this condition, *just and honorable* revenge is impossible, the resolution of the action must await the philosophical solution.³

Haydn is right in saying that Hamlet must search for philosophic integration before he can seek honorable revenge. We shall see if Hamlet achieves this integration in due time, but first we must examine the search itself and Hamlet's hints that a philosophic search is in fact taking place in the play.

We know that Hamlet is a student at Wittenberg, and as such we can assume that he is studied in all the basic sciences, religions, and philosophies. From his comment to Horatio that philosophy cannot answer all life's questions (1.5), we know that Hamlet, although quite the skeptic, believes there are some questions that philosophy can answer. In a dialogue with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet compares the phenomenon of the boy actors and the adulation given to them with the praise given to the once derided, now revered Claudius, and in doing so hints that philosophy may be able to "find out" what is "more than natural" in the phenomena of both the children players and the new king:

It [the popularity of the child actors] is not very strange; for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father lived give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if *philosophy* could find it out.

(2.2.359-64; my italics)⁴

³Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (1950; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 621. His italics.

⁴References to *Hamlet* are from *The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982).

Of course, we know that from the moment we first see him, Hamlet does little but philosophize about what is unnatural or about what is beyond the natural; we also know that Hamlet is aware of his philosophizing.

Not until late in the play does Hamlet's awareness of his own tendency to philosophize, debate, and equivocate reach its height, and this does not happen until he finally confronts a plainspeaking character—the grave-digger. The literal-minded grave-digger sees things as either right or wrong, white or black, living or dead, and when asked about the grave he is digging, nearly exasperates Hamlet with his plainness:

Hamlet. What man dost thou dig it for?

Grave-digger. For no man, sir.

Hamlet. What woman then?

Grave-digger. For none neither.

Hamlet. Who is to be buried in't?

Grave-digger. One that was a woman, sir; but rest her soul, she's dead.

Hamlet [to Horatio]. How absolute the knave is. We must speak by the card or equivocation will undo us.

(5.1.126-34; italics mine)

When we encounter these lines we immediately see a danger that has been looming over Hamlet throughout the entire play—the danger of debate. But this comment cannot be taken out of the context of the entire play, for very late in the play, when he answers Osric's question as to whether he has heard of Laertes' superiority with a sword, Hamlet hints at the method behind his constant philosophizing:

Osric. You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

Hamlet. I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; but to know a man well were to know himself.

(5.2.135-38)

This call to self-knowledge reminds us that man—humanistic optimist or Protestant determinist—is the center of the play; simultaneously it causes us to reexamine some of Hamlet's major speeches as they represent an attempt to understand man's relationship to the world by first understanding man's relationship to himself. Of course, this search for integration brings us right back to Classical humanistic optimism and evangelical Protestant determinism, for what are they but terms used to describe the ways an individual perceives the world and his place in

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it? With that in mind, it is easy to see that Hamlet's examination of the world, Man, and himself illustrates the fundamental tension between these opposing world views.

There are, admittedly, times when Hamlet appears wholly optimistic and other times when he seems completely deterministic, but these usually occur when he is with company other than his confidant Horatio. We can safely assume that if Hamlet ever truly speaks his mind, he does so either when he is conversing with Horatio or is soliloquizing. It is at these, his most honest moments, that he most visibly displays philosophic tension.

Early in the play, just before his encounter with his father's ghost, Hamlet tries to explain to Horatio the custom of the new King's revelries being accompanied by cannon fire. He says that the custom is not observed very often and that Denmark is thought to be a nation of drunkards because of Claudius' restoration of the old custom. In his 'defense' of Claudius, Hamlet describes man as being born with right reason unless he (in some particular instances) is stamped with a "vicious mole of nature," a flaw:

So, oft it chances in particular men
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty
(Since nature cannot choose its origin),
By their o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit, that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausible manners—that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being Nature's livery or Fortune's star. . .

(1.4.23-32)

This speech shows that Hamlet views man as not completely reasonable (full of reason) and not totally bestial (void of reason), even though the speech is about the drunkenness of Claudius whom he already suspects of being overgrown with evil. That man is capable of rational self-direction, of being consistently good, is inherent in any definition of humanistic optimism; that man is capable of being overleavened by some blemish to the extent that he has no power of self-direction is implicit in Protestant determinism. Here Hamlet acknowledges the existence of one while acknowledging the possibility of the other. But in this speech we see no real synthesis, no integration, because a deterministic idea is contrasted with a humanistic idea.

Later, when he sees the armies of Fortinbras, Hamlet soliloquizes about man's nature and about his inability to live up to his own moral and philosophic expectations. Admitting that he could have already performed the task of killing Claudius, he asks himself what it is in his nature that has prevented him from doing so:

How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge. What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unus'd. Now whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th'event—

(4.4.32-41)

Again Hamlet is talking about bestiality and reason, and again "godlike reason," that which separates man from the animals, is at the root of Classical humanism, while "bestial oblivion," that which rules man instead of being ruled by man, is at the root of Protestant determinism. The man of "large discourse" acts rationally toward an end while the man that "sleeps" and "feeds" acts impulsively and misses his object altogether. But here Hamlet is not sure which of these (if not both) he is. He says it could either be some "bestial oblivion" or some "craven scruple" that has kept him from his duty, but he does not know which of these it is. All he knows is that either because he is ruled by a passion (a "vicious mole" of his earlier speech) or because he reasons too much (thinks "too precisely"), still "this thing's to do."

This soliloquy also shows that Hamlet is embarrassed by the resolution of Fortinbras who is risking his entire army for a plot of ground that is so small it will not hold the bodies of those who will inevitably fall in the taking of it:

How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men.

(4.4.56-60)

Hamlet's Search for Philosophic Integration

33

It is Haydn's opinion that this soliloquy represents Hamlet's beginning awareness that he is becoming a whole man, that "Hamlet's beginning to feel, as well as to understand, that the opposition between honor and Stoicism, between blood and reason, between action and thought, is unnecessary to him" (p. 633; his italics). But what Haydn fails to see is that the "excitements of my reason and my blood" that Hamlet refers to are what produce his indecision. His excited reason produces a "craven scruple of thinking too precisely," and his excited blood produces a "bestial oblivion." Thus, Hamlet still illustrates the tension between reasoned Classical humanistic optimism and bestial evangelical Protestant determinism. Haydn's proclamation that "Integration is Imminent" (p. 633) gives place to John Dover Wilson's rather sarcastic remark that Hamlet "is now looking forward apparently to a life-time of bloody thoughts."⁵

The tension between Classical humanistic optimism and evangelical Protestant determinism reaches its height in the conversation between Hamlet and Horatio just before Osric delivers Laertes' challenge. In retelling how he got rid of the meddling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet refers to his rashness, plainly stating the idea that some kind of divinity directs us:

Hamlet. Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—
And prais'd be rashness for it: let us know
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall; and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—

Horatio. That is most certain.

(5.2.4-11)

In this speech Hamlet unknowingly twists a humanistic idea until it is forcibly transformed into a deterministic idea. "Deep plots" are self-directed, reasoned plans, plans that involve a man's intellect, and not his impulses. Hamlet very humanistically espouses the use of plots of self-directed reason, but when those "deep plots do pall," when reason falters, Hamlet espouses the rashness and indiscretion of bestiality, of determinism. Further (and I think at least in part to justify the sacrifice

⁵John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962), p. 261. His italics.

of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—to justify it to himself as well as to Horatio), Hamlet says that it really doesn't matter how badly we "rough-hew" our lives because a divinity "shapes" the end result of everything we ever do. The idea that a god exists is not contrary to humanistic optimism or to Protestant determinism, but Hamlet never says whether or not the "divinity" he mentions is a benevolent one. In fact, judging from the assuredness of his reply, it seems that it is Horatio and not necessarily Hamlet who has the clearer understanding of what is being said. We do know, however, that this divinity may have been what kept Hamlet from dying at the hands of the English officials (or was it his rash indiscretion?).

In further defending his reaction to the machinations of Claudius, Hamlet further twists optimism and determinism as he again vows revenge:

Horatio. So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.

Hamlet. Why, man, they did make love to this employment.

They are not near my conscience, their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow.

'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.

Horatio. Why, what a king is this!

Hamlet. Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
He that hath killed my king and whor'd my mother,
Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life
And with such coz'nage—is't not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damn'd
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

(5.2.56-70)⁶

Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern did "make love to" the plot to kill Hamlet, they undoubtedly did so with blindfolds on. There is nothing

⁶Notice here that for the first time in the play Hamlet adds a personal affront to his previous list of indictments against Claudius (4.4.56-65). Now, having discovered a plot of "coz'nage" against his own life, Hamlet has indiscreetly made his way back to Denmark. He had, at the time he wrote his letters to Horatio (4.6.12-28) and to Claudius (4.7.42-46), begun to lose sight of the reason and blood that are now completely indistinguishable.

ing in the text of the play to support the claim that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern knew what was in the sealed commission, and it would have been political suicide for them to cut off their future hopes for present loyalty. But that Hamlet considered them a personal threat is obvious from the fact that he so connivingly did away with them (by putting the deadly commission in their hands instead of pouring poison in their ears). Ironically, then, Hamlet becomes like Claudius in a sense. Instead of simply tearing up the commission or forging a less severe one, Hamlet chooses to murder Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet's reason is twisted, and he relies on the existence of an aloof divinity as a means of clearing his conscience.

Hamlet's vow of revenge in the second part of this dialogue takes on a more keen sense of irony as he unwittingly alludes to his earlier statement on the "vicious mole of nature," the King's drunkenness. Hamlet now says that Claudius is the personification of a "canker of our nature," a cancer that must be destroyed. In saying so, however, Hamlet fails to see that he, having in effect murdered not one person but two, has himself become a canker that must likewise be destroyed. Hamlet is unable to see the difference between reason and blood. Humanistic optimism and Protestant determinism have become distorted to the point where they are unrecognizable, and thus indistinguishable. Hamlet is damned if he lets the "canker of our nature come in further evil" and damned if he lets it grow.

How aware Hamlet is of what has happened in his own mind is subject to debate, but by the time of his last speech before the match with Laertes, it is evident that he knows he has changed.⁷ Although he suspects that Claudius and Laertes are up to something, he rejects Horatio's advice to the contrary and goes ahead with the match:

Horatio. If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

Hamlet. Not a whit. We defy augury. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to

⁷Similarly, how aware Horatio is of the change in Hamlet is subject to debate. Wilson says Horatio's reply (3.2.62) refers to Claudius' crafty use of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (31-32). Haydn, on the other hand, says Horatio's line is one of surprise at Hamlet's "new strength and confidence in the rightness of his actions" (p. 634). However, Horatio, acquainted with Claudius' true character (3.2.63-87), would not be surprised at a new plot. Here Hamlet is trying to justify his rash actions, and his reply to Horatio's exclamation is a defense against the accusations of wrongdoing that might possibly be made. Hamlet's defensiveness implies that Horatio is surprised at the callousness of the prince turned murderer.

come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now,
yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man, of
aught he leaves, knows aught, what is't to leave betimes?
Let be.

(5.2.213-20)⁸

Conscience does not make a coward of Hamlet because he has extinguished his conscience in the murders of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; the same feeling of uneasiness that saved him from an inglorious death in England does not deter him for a moment because of his end-shaping divinity, his "special providence" that will do what it will; and since man does not have any real knowledge of what he is leaving, it makes little sense to "bear those ills we have" when we can "fly to others that we know not of." Hamlet's readiness does not signify resolution so much as it does resignation.

Haydn is mistaken when he says that Hamlet achieves integration, reconciles the opposites, and thus accepts the Stoic's view of an honorable death (635-36).⁹ Hamlet does not achieve integration because he loses sight of the opposites—reason and blood, humanistic optimism and Protestant determinism—he must reconcile, and there is no "honorable death" in the world Horatio promises to describe to Fortinbras and the English ambassadors:

So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
And, in the upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th'inventor's heads. All this can I
Truly deliver.

(5.2.385-91)

⁸Hamlet's "special providence" is more closely related to his "divinity" than it is to the "outrageous fortune" of his early soliloquy (3.1.56-60). Fortune in the play is happenstance, and as such is a Renaissance combination of *Persona Fortuna*, the Fortune of Time, and the Fortune of Death that Howard Patch refers to as typically Medieval. See Howard Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 88-122.

⁹Haydn's notion that the opposites which Hamlet must reconcile are not inevitable opponents unless held immoderately ignores the fact that Hamlet is always immoderate in his reason or in his blood; and although Haydn alludes to Hamlet's speech praising Horatio's unswerving character (3.2.56-74), he ignores the fact that Hamlet praises Horatio because Horatio's demeanor is so different from his own.

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Following this speech Fortinbras describes the bloody sight as one which "becomes the field" more than the court, ordering that Hamlet be borne away "like a soldier" to be placed in the view of those of "th'yet unknowing world" who will hear Horatio's narrative. It is not inappropriate for Hamlet to be so honored for he is a soldier, as well as a prince and scholar; but more than any of these, Hamlet is a man, and it is as a man—of reason or of blood—that we see him in the play.

Hamlet is a man caught at the crossroads of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the broad junction of humanistic optimism and Protestant determinism. Losing sight of his abstract (however conflicting) world views, Hamlet is swept away by the absolutes he attempts to reconcile. We in the twentieth century empathize with the "sweet prince" not because he succeeds, but because he *attempts*. It is in the pursuance of philosophic integration that Hamlet, in the end, proves "most royal."

“Self” Examination and Readiness in *Hamlet*

CRAIG A. BERNTHAL*

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it

(Luke 17:33)

There is a Chinese story of one who came to a great sage, saying, “I have no peace of mind. Please pacify my mind.” The sage answered, “Bring out your mind (your “I”) before me, and I will pacify it.” “These many years,” he replied, “I have sought my mind but I cannot find it.” “There,” concluded the sage, “it is pacified,”

(from Alan W. Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*)

We are to have what we have as if it were loaned to us and not given; to be without proprietary right to body soul, mind or faculties. . . .

(Meister Eckhart)

* * *

There is a transcendent moment in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet, having emerged from a period of anguish and self-doubt, calmly submits his fate to providence and stops trying to control events. About to enter a contest in which he knows he may be killed, Hamlet tells Horatio:

. . . we defy augury. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

(5:2:208-13)¹

“The readiness is all.” What is the meaning of this statement? In his essay, “Ripeness is All,” J.V. Cunningham² distinguishes two meanings of Hamlet’s phrase: (1) the meaning which a modern audience is likely to

* This article owes much to the inspiration and interest of Professor Philip C. McGuire and to the stylistic advice of Professor Candida Gillis.

¹All quotations from the text of *Hamlet* are taken from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: The Viking Press, 1969).

²J.V. Cunningham, “Ripeness is All,” in *The Collected Essays of J.V. Cunningham* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1976), pp. 1-8.

understand, and (2) the meaning Shakespeare actually intended. Cunningham states that a modern audience is likely to understand the phrase

... to gather something of the ultimate value of life; it reassures us that maturity of experience is a final good and that there is a fulness of feeling, an inner and emotional completeness in life, that is attainable and will resolve our tragedies.

Though Cunningham admits the appeal of such an interpretation, "It is not," he argues, "what Shakespeare meant." By "readiness is all," Shakespeare meant "that man dies when God is ready" and therefore man must be ready to die at any time:

... This is as much to say that we must endure our going hence be it when it may, since the hour of our death is in the care of Providence: *the readiness is all* . . . (emphasis in original).

The difference in meaning, Cunningham contends, is unmistakable: "Ours looks toward life and [Shakespeare's] toward death; ours finds its locus in modern psychology and his in Christian theology." Whether these two interpretations really *are* significantly different is something I will consider later. Of more immediate importance is Cunningham's decision to interpret Shakespeare's meaning rather than Hamlet's.

At the beginning of his essay, Cunningham states, "I am concerned here with understanding precisely what Shakespeare meant." If, however, Shakespeare & Co. (directors, actors, stage hands, *et al.*) have done their job well, no one in the audience is going to be concerned with what Shakespeare meant. They are going to be concerned with what Hamlet meant and what the statement reveals about Hamlet's character. Certainly, the Hamlet who can calmly face his own death and say "The readiness is all" is a different person than the Hamlet who first appears in mourning clothes explaining, "I have that within which passeth show." Hamlet has changed, during the course of the play, from a man who seems trapped in introspection to one who has broken out of it into a state of receptiveness, heightened awareness and calm. I believe that the full contextual meaning of Hamlet's statement, "The readiness is all," cannot be fully understood unless we examine *Hamlet* as a play which explores the idea of "self" consciousness (what cognitive psychologists call "meta-cognition," the mind observing its own mental processes). My argument is that Hamlet could not have achieved a state of heightened awareness and calmness—"readiness"—without first passing through the inner turmoil that he displays in the first four acts of the play. In other words, a period of "ripening" must occur before such a

thing as "readiness" can be achieved and, in order to fully understand "readiness," one must understand the process of *getting* ready. "Self" examination, I believe, forms the major part of the ripening process by which Hamlet finally becomes "ready."

Our culture tends to devalue such periods of getting ready. Even Hamlet's statement, "The readiness is all," seems to devalue everything that has gone before, since if being ready is "all," then one would want to *get* ready as soon as possible. However, I do not believe that Shakespeare minimized the importance or value of what Hamlet goes through to reach his state of readiness. Neither do I think that Shakespeare saw "readiness" as a necessarily superior state of being under all circumstances. Rather, the play recognizes both the value of introspection (Hamlet's demand that Gertrude look within herself) and the value of instinctive action (Hamlet's leap aboard the pirate ship and his actions upon discovering his death warrant), while acknowledging the dangers of both. Hamlet continually questions the appropriateness of his own introspection and Gertrude questions Hamlet's misguided instinctive action when he mistakenly kills Polonius, taking the old man for the king. Shakespeare is exploring many different aspects of self consciousness and lack of consciousness, the way a person's state of mind affects and is affected by events, and the appropriateness, or inappropriateness of certain states of mind in relation to accomplishing a particular task. In this exploration, Shakespeare is simply following the Renaissance rhetorical practice of considering as many sides of a question as possible. This rhetorical approach is what Joel Altman, in *The Tudor Play of Mind*, refers to as the "moral cultivation of ambivalence":

... a great many Renaissance plays [are] questions: questions about love, justice, sovereignty, nature, imagination—even questions that question whether such questions can be answered. Whimsical though this may seem, the term is not offered facetiously. For I shall propose that these plays did not merely raise questions, in the general sense, but literally were questions—or rather fictional realizations of questions. . . .³

In this way, a Shakespeare play can be taken as something of a Zen koan. As the audience watches Hamlet struggle with questions of identity and self consciousness, it too is confronted with these questions, and finally, the question of whether these questions can even be answered. And like a koan, *Hamlet* is a success, not if it provides one cor-

³Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 2-3.

"Self" Examination and Readiness in Hamlet

rect, articulable answer, but if it enriches the audience's experience of the questions being asked.

Most of the questions about self consciousness which are explored in *Hamlet* follow directly from an examination of Polonius's advice to Laertes:

This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(1.3.78-80)

The first implication of Polonius's statement is that human nature is somehow bifurcated. There is the "self" and then there is some "other" who is true or untrue to his "self." The self seems to be some elemental, fixed, inner identity while this "other" entity seems to be a more public manifestation of personality—a *persona*—which may or may not correspond to the inner reality of the self, to what a person actually is. (Polonius's statement must imply this bifurcation, since if a person is *only* composed of the self, then it would be definitionally impossible for that person to be untrue to his self. Every manifestation of a human being's personality, including confusion and deceit, would simply be taken as an inherent part of that person's nature.)

The second implication is that this inner self is not solely defined by a person's relationship to people, institutions, or over-all environment. Being true to one's self *precedes* being true to others. Self understanding must come before any honest relationship.

The third implication is that a person possesses this self. One has a self of one's *own*, a unique core identity which has value and is worth preserving. To say: "To thine *own* self be true," is to acknowledge the primacy of individual conscience.

The fourth implication is that this self can actually be found and understood, otherwise, Polonius's direction would be a command to do an impossible act. This, of course, brings up the next question: where does one find one's self? If we posit some superficial outer self which should be true to a deeper self, is there another, even deeper self, that these selves should be true to, and after that, another deeper self, and so on *ad infinitum*? Just where is this self anyway? In trying to be sincere is one really just acting the part of a sincere person? And is there a deeper self, acting the part of the actor who is playing the role of the sincere person? Searching for one's self begins to resemble the act of standing two mirrors fact to face and then trying to decide which image, out of an infinite corridor of images, is real.

The preceding discussion illustrates how each implication of Polonius's statement leads us to consider its negation. Polonius's statement may simply be wrong. A fixed inner self—a self of one's own, to which one can be true—may simply not exist. Or, if the self exists, it may be so mutable that the concept of a more or less fixed identity becomes illusory.

Most of the characters in *Hamlet* seem to act on the assumption that, indeed, there is a true, fixed, inner self to which a person should be true. Throughout the play, characters state or imply that a basic correspondence between inner and outer reality is a virtue. Polonius's statement crystallizes this attitude. As Lionel Trilling states:

Polonius has had a moment of self-transcendence, of grace and truth. He has conceived of sincerity as an essential condition of virtue and has discovered how it is to be attained.⁴

Characters and actors throughout the play protest their sincerity. Thus, in his first speech, Hamlet declares he is not just playacting his grief, but he has "that within which passeth show." Of course, whether a character's inner reality is truly reflected in his outward demeanor, speeches and actions becomes the question out of which most of the dramatic action in *Hamlet* develops. Is the ghost really Hamlet's father, or is it a demon from hell? Is Claudius guilty or innocent? Was Gertrude an accomplice in her husband's murder? Even aside from the major scenes in which characters try to fathom each other's inner reality by spying on one another (Polonius spies on Hamlet and Laertes; Hamlet spies on Claudius during the "Mousetrap"; Rosencrance and Guildenstern ineptly "play upon" Hamlet), the characters exhibit a pervasive need, even in mundane situations, to draw correspondences between each other's inner reality and outer show. For instance, when Horatio tells Hamlet that he has left Wittenberg because of a "truant disposition," Hamlet, almost compulsively, tries to realign Horatio's true self with Horatio's actions:

I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do my ear that violence
To make it truster of your own report
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.

(1.2.170-3)

⁴Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3.

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Usually, however, the challenge is not in the simple correction of a friend's too modest self-appraisal. The difficulty is in making crucial and fundamental character judgments. In a scene occurring after Hamlet has seen the ghost and then confronted Ophelia, Ophelia describes Hamlet's attempt to fathom her character:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As 'a would draw it.

(2.1.87-91)

Hamlet's persual of Ophelia is an attempt to see past the outer show into her very soul. Whether Hamlet concludes he cannot fathom Ophelia's reality—or that he can, somehow, see into her soul and finds it black and grained—is impossible to say. The dramatic significance is in Hamlet's tortured search for an answer. Similarly, in the closet scene between Hamlet and Gertrude, Hamlet tells his mother:

You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see *the inmost part of you*.

(3.4.20-2; emphasis added)

to which Gertrude can only plead:

O Hamlet, speak no more
Thou turn'st my eyes *into my very soul*,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

(3.4.89-92; emphasis added)

As final proof that there is some fundamental inner self or soul to which one may or may not be true, in walks the ghost, who tells Hamlet to step between Gertrude and her “fighting soul.” The ghost, it would seem, is walking proof that there are such things as “selves” (or souls). (However, this ghost seems so concerned with matters bearing upon corporeal existence that one wonders whether he has found his own “self.” On the other hand, perhaps this explains why the ghost is in purgatory.)

If the characters in *Hamlet* are concerned about self-knowledge and sincerity, they are also concerned with upholding an appropriate public image. The fashioning of an outer self can become part of a larger

strategy of survival or domination. Characters cultivate public selves for practical reasons. Hamlet's popularity probably saves him from summary execution. (Even in death, Hamlet does not want to leave behind a wounded name. He has his pride.) Claudius must deal carefully with Laertes because of Laertes's great popular support. Claudius is obviously the extreme example of a man who has fashioned an outward self as a strategy. Appearing to be calm and virtuous (and indeed, he may have some virtues), he is at the same time, an adulterer and murderer. Claudius's tragedy is that he has identified himself so completely with his public image, power and wealth, that he has become alienated from his inner self. Having achieved the public identity of "kin," he loses his soul; he cannot be forgiven because he is still possessed

Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.

(3.3:54-5)

At the opposite extreme from Claudius is Horatio who seems to bring his outer self into close accord with his inner self. It is interesting that Horatio is from Wittenberg, therefore, almost assuredly Lutheran, or at least Protestant. As Lionel Trilling notes, with the rise of Protestantism "plain speaking became the order of the day," and sophistry became associated with Catholicism.⁵ Not only does Horatio's character, according to Hamlet, coincide with Horatio's outer appearance, but Horatio is living evidence that man may indeed have an immutable soul; for Hamlet describes Horatio

As one in suff'ring all that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please.

(3.2.62-8)

Hamlet's admiration of Horatio appears to reflect Hamlet's own need to find a solid and immutable core identity which will help him to weather the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. However, if there is a pervasive assumption throughout *Hamlet* that such an inner self exists, there is an equally pervasive undercurrent that the self does *not* exist—or that if it does exist, it cannot be understood, fixed in its charac-

⁵Ibid., p. 22.

teristics, or even located. The possibility that nothingness exists at his core is what drives Hamlet "mad."

Hamlet's urgent need to find or fashion a self is a direct result of the disorientation Hamlet experiences in the wake of his father's death. Before the death of King Hamlet, Hamlet undoubtedly had a fairly prescribed courtly role to play, as he does even after his father's death. As Laertes explains to Ophelia, Hamlet's social position sets rigid limits on the kind of person Hamlet can be:

His greatness weighed, his will is not his own.
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself.

(2.3.17-20)

Stephen Greenblatt notes that in sixteenth-century England, there "were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned. . . ." He also notes, however, that there is "considerable empirical evidence that there may well have been less *autonomy* in self-fashioning in the sixteenth century than before," that "family, state, and religious institutions impose a more rigid and far-reaching discipline upon their middle-class and aristocratic subjects."⁶ (One might object that *Hamlet* is set in a pre-sixteenth century time frame, but there seems little doubt that Shakespeare's Denmark bears a striking resemblance to Shakespeare's England.) It seems reasonable to assume that Hamlet has constructed a self-identity in the context of a somewhat rigid social milieu. But what happens when Hamlet's social milieu disintegrates? Hamlet's self-identity disintegrates with it. In the loss of his father, the discovery that Claudius is his father's murderer, and that Gertrude has committed adultery with Claudius, Hamlet simply loses his self. The people by whom Hamlet has defined himself have either disappeared or have been revealed as radically different from what Hamlet imagined they were. The more Hamlet learns, the more he loses any conception of himself as a stable and fixed personality. R.D. Laing gives a succinct statement of the role which personal relationships and environment play in determining one's concept of his self:

The most significant theoretical and methodological development in the psychiatry of the last two decades is . . . the growing dissatisfac-

⁶Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 1.

tion with any theory . . . of the individual which isolates him from his context

A person's 'own' identity cannot be completely abstracted from his identity-for-others. His identity-for-himself; the identity others ascribe to him; the identities he attributes to them; the identity or identities he thinks they attribute to him; what he thinks they think he thinks they think.

Other people become a sort of identity kit, whereby one can piece together a picture of oneself. One recognizes oneself in that old smile of recognition from that old friend.⁷

Shakespeare, of course, was well aware of "identity kits" (for instance, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, consider what happens to Christopher Sly when he is stripped of *his* identity kit) and it is certainly reassuring to know that modern psychiatry is catching up with the Renaissance. Hamlet's identity kit has rather drastically changed. He is no longer the son of a king, and his succession to the throne may even be in doubt, Claudius having "popped in between th' election and [Hamlet's] hopes"; Hamlet can no longer see himself as the son of a chaste and virtuous mother, since he has discovered she is an adulteress and possibly an accomplice to her late husband's murder. Furthermore, Gertrude's attentions are mainly directed toward her new husband, Claudius, and not to Hamlet. Hamlet's childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are transparent spies, and Ophelia, whom Hamlet loved, obeys her father and refuses to see Hamlet; Ophelia even aids her father in spying on Hamlet. With the exception of Horatio, virtually every person by whom Hamlet knows himself is radically altered or unavailable. On top of all this, the ghost is demanding vengeance; yet as a responsible political figure, Hamlet cannot simply perform a regicide which might lead to his own execution or even to civil war. It becomes crucial to Hamlet to find some inner self by which he can harmonize the conflicting roles fate has forced him to play.

However, the more Hamlet searches for a self that will allow him to act as a fully integrated and empowered human being, the more impossible it becomes to find that self. The question of whether such a self even exists surfaces repeatedly. Thus, Hamlet is not only dealing with the loss of his own identity, but with the possibility that there may be no such thing as identity. This possibility becomes a powerful revelation to Hamlet in Act 2, Scene 2, after the players exit with Polonius.

⁷R.D. Laing, *Self and Others* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1961), pp. 81, 86-7.

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Hamlet finds it marvelous that an actor can shed tears over a fictional woman ("What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?") while he, Hamlet, has good cause to "drown the stage with tears . . . cleave the general ear with horrid speech, make mad the guilty," and yet does nothing. Hamlet then gives way to histrionic self condemnation, calling himself a "dull and muddy-mettled rascal . . . unpregnant of [his] cause . . . pigeon livered and lack [ing] gall." But as Hamlet approaches his peroration, he comes to a staggering insight. He is *acting*! He may be his own sole audience, but nonetheless, he is acting the part of the mourning son:

. . . what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A stallion! Fie upon't, foh! About, my brains.

(2.2.568-73).

Hamlet is forced to ask himself the question of whether he is really sincere or whether he is just playing the part of a sincere person. And having gone this far, he is faced with another question: Is he playing the part of an actor playing the part of a sincere person? Is he playing the part of an actor playing the part of an actor playing the part of a sincere person? And since this regression can be carried backwards infinitely, where is the real Hamlet? Where is the real self? The horror of staring internally, into nothingness, is the horror that Hamlet sees in his madness. The questions raised by Hamlet's self-reflection are raised for the audience by Shakespeare's structure of the "Mousetrap" scene. As Claudius watches the "Mousetrap," Hamlet watches Claudius watching the "Mousetrap." The audience, among other things, watches Hamlet watching Claudius watch the "Mousetrap." The question put to the audience is inescapable. Is what we think of as reality merely a play within a play? Are we characters being watched by an audience while we sit watching the "Mousetrap" scene of *Hamlet*? And is the audience watching *us* being watched by another audience, and so on, *ad infinitum*? And if this is so, what happens to the self? What happens to reality? As we watch Hamlet examine himself, the concept of "sincerity" loses its solidity.

Alongside Hamlet's horror at viewing himself as a nonentity stands Hamlet's horror at viewing himself as wholly mutable—capable of

anything. In the scene immediately following the scene in which Hamlet castigates himself for unpacking his heart with words, Hamlet reveals to Ophelia something of his suspicion that human nature may be a protean monstrosity:

... I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in.

(3.1.122-7).

Even Ophelia, later in the play, says: "We know what we are [an assertion Hamlet could argue with] but *know not what we may be*" (4.5.43-4; emphasis added). The disturbing implication of both Hamlet's and Ophelia's insights is that, if man is indeed protean, who can ever be trusted? How can a man even trust himself when there is no alternative to play-acting, but merely the choice between one role and another?⁸

Whether Hamlet looks into himself and finds *nothing* or whether he looks into himself and finds *anything*, the whole notion of having one's own self dissolves. Though Hamlet desperately needs a stable self—a self in which he can establish a proprietary interest—there seems to be no self to grasp. By the conclusion of Act 3, Scene 1, in which Hamlet advises Ophelia to enter a nunnery, virtually every assumption contained in Polonius's epigram, "To thine own self be true," has been called into question. There may be no self at all, or if there is, it may be so protean and mutable that "identity" becomes a meaningless concept on all but a superficial level.

Given the psychological mousetrap Hamlet is in, his admission that he has "lost all [his] mirth" and that "man delights [him] not," is perfectly understandable. How, then, does Hamlet emerge from this introspective agony? How can he finally make the statement, "The readiness is all"? Again, there is no definite answer to this question, but a few possibilities present themselves. One is that Hamlet's brush with death in the sea battle with the pirates has, as Dr. Johnson might say, wonderfully concentrated Hamlet's mind. Hamlet's further contemplation of death—its universality and unavoidability—in the graveyard scene, reinforces the sea experience. Presto! We have a new Hamlet. However, I

⁸See Eric Bentley, "Theatre and Therapy," *New American Review*, 8 (1970), 133-4.

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feel that Hamlet's "transformation" is the result of many more factors. On an intellectual level, Hamlet has realized the inevitability and universality of death all along. He refers to man as a quintessence of dust (2.2.304). He describes the progress of a king through the guts of a beggar (4.3.19-39). However, no matter what Hamlet, the intellectual, says he knows about the inevitability of death, his desperate attempt to find an immutable self—a fixed identity—proves that he has not really internalized an acceptance of death. The search for such a self—the need for stability and immutability—is ultimately a denial of death. "The very term, '*self-preservation*,' implies an effort against some force of disintegration; the affective aspect of this is fear, fear of death"⁹ (emphasis added).

Does Hamlet, in searching for his self, come to the conclusion that there is really no self to lose? Does he conclude that, in a sense, man carries his own oblivion around inside him anyway, so death is nothing to be afraid of? Or does he make a leap of faith, deciding that he has a soul, even though he cannot find it, and that he will put his faith in God, since he has no other alternative? Certainly Hamlet is not persuaded by conclusions from reasoned arguments that he must change his attitude toward death. Rather, from an intense concentration on these questions Hamlet's search for the self brings him to a resolution—an acceptance of death. Hamlet, in his own description of what has happened to him, can only say:

... in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly
And praised be rashness for it—let us know,
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

(5.2.4-11).

Hamlet no longer tries to fix and hold on to an immutable identity. He gives up the struggle to establish a "proprietary interest" in his self and stops viewing life as a riddle in need of a solution. In relinquishing his search for the self, Hamlet paradoxically becomes more real—more centered and powerful—than he ever was. In his final willingness to let go of his self, he finds it.

⁹G. Zilboorg, "Fear of Death," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 12 (1943), 467.

That Hamlet actually has undergone a transformation can be powerfully demonstrated in his duel with Laertes. Hamlet is a "three touch" underdog and although Hamlet feels he will "win at the odds," he acknowledges Laertes as the better swordsman. Yet, Hamlet scores the first two hits and out "plays" Laertes throughout the entire match. The text provides plenty of opportunity for a director to present a Hamlet who is "playing over his head," and many actors have played this scene as "play" (consider Lawrence Olivier's jump from the balcony or Nicol Williamson's behind-the-back swats at Laertes). Hamlet is now able to ignore himself, and this gives him a tremendous psychological advantage over Laertes:

Perfection in the art of swordsmanship is reached . . . when the heart is troubled by no more thought of I and You, of the opponent and his sword, or one's own sword and how to wield it—no more thought even of life and death. All is emptiness: Your own self, the flashing sword, and the arms that wield it. Even the thought of emptiness is no longer there. From this absolute emptiness . . . comes the most wondrous unfoldment of doing.¹⁰

In true play, for actors, audience and swordsman, the self is forgotten and because forgotten, emerges in its most powerful form. Hamlet's achievement in losing himself in the sword fight corresponds with the audience's experience of losing itself in the play, and in the process, experiencing the truths of the play with a depth that no rational explanation could provide.

Hamlet's last request that Horatio tell Hamlet's story, ere Hamlet leave behind a "wounded name," is an important qualification to any interpretation that would simply present a Hamlet who has gone beyond the need for a public identity. Hamlet still recognizes the practical political consequences of self-fashioning. But more importantly, he really does not want to die with a wounded name. He still has his pride. Is this inconsistent with the preceding argument that Hamlet has transcended himself? No. Neither Shakespeare nor Hamlet is implying that one particular state of consciousness is better than another under all circumstances. If anything, the play shows that there is a time for self-examination and a time for readiness—a time to worry about one's self-image and a time when it is absolutely imperative to become self-forgetful. It is Hamlet's new ability to live without final answers—to improve

¹⁰Eugene Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971) p. 85.

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wise his performance as he goes along—that marks his growth as a human being and enables him to act with certainty.

This leads us back to J.V. Cunningham's two interpretations of "The readiness is all." Both the modern interpretation, which Cunningham says Shakespeare did not mean, and the Renaissance understanding, which Cunningham says Shakespeare did mean, can now be seen as describing the meaning of the dramatic moment when Hamlet says "The readiness is all." That Hamlet has accepted his inability to preserve his self—that he will die and must "endure his going hence"—is certain. Hamlet is ready for death. But, I believe that his "readiness" has emerged from maturity of experience and that, going into the sword fight, Hamlet has a fullness of feeling and an inner and emotional completeness that can only occur when one has accepted death. Cunningham's "Renaissance" interpretation tells us what Hamlet is ready *for*; the "modern" interpretation emphasizes the psychological consequences of *being* ready.

In the same way that going through a period of inner struggle and questioning leads Hamlet to an acceptance of death, the audience watching *Hamlet* may take a step toward such acceptance. The moral value of the play is in the questioning process itself more than in any final answer. The "answer" which Hamlet (and perhaps the audience) finally achieves is the wholeness that emerges from repeatedly asking unanswerable questions. As Joel Altman states:

... [Many Renaissance plays] functioned as a media of intellectual and emotional exploration of minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a given theme, to entertain opposing ideals, and by so exercising the understanding, to move toward some fuller appreciation of truth that could be discerned only through the total action of the drama. Thus, the experience of the play was the thing. . . .¹¹

To understand the *experience* of the moment when Hamlet says, "The readiness is all," one cannot simply interpret the words that come out of Hamlet's mouth. One must join Hamlet in the process of asking questions about selves within selves and plays within plays. The success of *Hamlet* cannot be measured by the conclusions it produces. In the end, the *readiness* is all.

¹¹Altman (n. 3 above), p. 6.

“He is justly served”: The Ordering of Experience in *Hamlet*

PAUL GAUDET

When Shakespeare finally provides an audience of *Hamlet* with the long-delayed death of Claudius, he vindicates his protagonist's action by having Laertes assert, “He is justly served” (5.2.327).¹ Laertes' absolution of Hamlet seems strangely to run counter to the suspicious and antagonistic attitude toward Hamlet that he has held with increasing intensity since 1.3: he (like his father) has warned Ophelia to distrust Hamlet's love; he has aligned himself with Claudius in a totally unscrupulous pursuit of revenge; he has grappled angrily with Hamlet over the corpse of Ophelia; and he has inflicted Hamlet's death-wound. Yet, at the end, justice for Laertes resides not in vengeance against Hamlet but in the slaying of Claudius. This sudden reversal by Laertes might, in isolation, seem a rhetorical imposition, part of a narrative resolution that is at odds with the character's nature and role. In performance, however, where an audience is immediately and instinctively aware of drama as a serial and, therefore, cumulative art form, Laertes' words are less likely to trouble us, and more likely to voice the desires that Shakespeare's text has progressively stimulated in us.

I

As much performance criticism of the last decade has affirmed, one of the principal ways in which Shakespeare's text signifies and directs attention is in its *ordering of experience*—by which I mean both the sequential arrangement of dramatic moments and the imposition of significant form, that dramatic shape or sense which results when the successive moments are taken together, as a whole. Whether consciously or not, *succession* and *synthesis* constitute cotemporal perceptual activities for an audience during performance. We experience dramatic moments, receive impressions (or sets of impressions) one at a time in an order fixed by the dramatist. As one moment gives way to the next, we have the sensation of temporal flow, of something occurring in and

¹*Hamlet*, ed. Frank Kermode, The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). All further references to this work appear in the text.

"He is justly served"

through time.² As soon as we have two or more such moments set out in a temporal order, our perceptual activity becomes more complex. The impression we receive is no longer a simple matter of taking in what is immediately before us, but of understanding (or intuiting) how the "present" interacts with the past—how it modifies and is modified by what has gone before—and how the existing sequence of moments suggests probable future moments. Thus, our experience of every dramatic moment except the very first requires synthesis, a sifting and weighing of impressions that is immediate, retrospective and expectant at the same time.³ It is through this compound interaction of dramatic impressions that Shakespeare involves his audience, almost co-creatively, in the living out of his drama. Each dramatic moment is, to borrow a phrase from Stephen Booth, an action upon the understanding of an audience, creating its own effects and pressures that demand our imagi-

²Temporality is central to the presentation and preception of a play. J.L. Styan, *The Elements of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 68, refers to the shift of impressions as the motive force of drama: "Drama is composed of the infinite combinations and permutations of such impressions moving in time." Daniel Seltzer concurs, in "The Shape of *Hamlet* in the Theater," in *Perspectives on "Hamlet,"* eds. William G. Holzberger and Peter B. Waldeck (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1975). p. 166: "The shape of any play in performance is visual, aural and temporal." For a more extended discussion of the temporal perception of dramatic segments in performance and of the cumulative nature of temporal flow, see Bernard Beckerman, *Dynamics of Dramā: Theory and Method of Analysis* (New York: Knopf, 1970), pp. 38-44; 51-53.

³Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), has written about the temporal and synthetic experience of listening to music: "at any given moment we are perceiving the tones being played or the words being read, and at the same time we are remembering what has gone before and forming an expectation of what will come next" (p. 35). See also E.H. Gombrich's discussion of temporal expectation as a "mental set . . . that state of readiness to start projecting," in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Bollingen Series XXXV, 2nd ed., rev. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 227ff. Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 400, stresses the importance of "the temporal flow of the reading experience" and "its cumulative pressures": "there is a point at which the reader has taken in only the first word, and then the second, and then the third" etc. See also E.A.J. Honigmann's comments on an audience's conscious and unconscious sifting of impressions, *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies—The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 2-3, and Jean E. Howard's treatment of the sensory dimensions of theatrical experience and of Shakespeare's techniques for engaging his audience, in *Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration: Stage Technique and Audience Response* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

native participation and guide our response.¹ For a spectator during performance, much of this activity is probably instinctive and preconscious.⁵ However, by approaching the text as a deliberate and meaningful sequence of shifting impressions, those of us who wish to talk about Shakespearean performance and "some necessary question of the play" (3.2.42-3) can come closer to understanding the demands that a given play makes of its audience.

The modulated impressions in Shakespearean drama are an effective means of engaging an audience's attention because they necessitate a constant adjusting of perspective. The opening scenes of *Hamlet*, for example, in presenting two radically contrasting worlds—the one, dark, spectral, and ominous; the other, bright, worldly, and reassuring in its apparent normality—require that we try to make sense of the relationship between these two worlds and their contradictory "truths." In the last scene of *Love's Labor's Lost* Shakespeare plays with our expectations of comic form when he shatters festive diversion with the sobering news of death and teasingly suspends the usual comic resolution. Exactly what will have happened in a year's time, the specific form of the play's future anterior, will depend on individual response to the play's evidence, which is itself equivocal: all, or some, or one of the lords will

¹Stephen Booth, "On the Value of *Hamlet*," in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 139.

⁵Stanley Fish, p. 390, makes a similar point about simple utterances in literature: "a great deal is going on in their production and comprehension . . . although most of it is going on so close up, at such a basic 'preconscious' level of experience, that we tend to overlook it." In any performance medium, there are numerous sense impressions which are registered without conscious reflection. See, for example, Paula Johnson, *Form and Transformation in Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 1-20. According to Johnson, a work "is fed through conscious perception into the preconscious and is there available to conscious voluntary memory as a complete poetic or musical constellation" (p. 13). I would modify this theory by observing that some deeply planted impressions can surface involuntarily after the performance in a kind of instinctual retrospection. Whether voluntary or involuntary, retrospection is a valid part of performance-related critical activity. In his rejection of retrospective response, Fish does not take into account that his critical method allows for an *in process* retrospection which is impossible during continuous performance: "Essentially what the method does is *slow down* the reading experience so that 'events' one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytic attention" (p. 389). A reader can arrest the act of progressive reading in order to reflect (this is a normal part of the activity of reading). However, this reflection and retarding that occur *during* the reading of a novel, poem, or play, occur in their fullest sense for performed drama *after* the performance.

succeed or fail according to what a spectator wishes to project as a result of experiencing the play. Conversely, in the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare inserts his 'prologue' to the ring episode, an inversion of the disruptive pattern caused by Marcade; he suddenly and illogically forces us to incorporate into our serious impressions of vengeance and death the possibility of comic wrangling between newlyweds. In each of these instances, Shakespeare's juxtaposition of impressions creates a perceptual tension (cognitive, affective, tonal) that demands clarification and synthesis within each member of the audience.

Our first impressions of the world of *Richard II* involve a similar adjustment of perspective. Shakespeare follows a public scene of ceremonial justice and declaimed counter-charges with a private scene of accusation that compromises the King and implies the concealing power of ceremony. Shakespeare then repeats this alternation of public and private impressions in the next two scenes. One possible effect of this pattern is to confirm and generalize our underlying sense of an oblique political world where what is thought and said in private remains publicly mute. Through a sequence of particular impressions, we have been led to a larger synthetic impression.

II

As the example from *Richard II* demonstrates, dramatic impressions can also accumulate to delineate a principal thrust of the play's action and energy, establish a pervasive mood or mode of perception, and generally help to signal a more summative audience response. While recognizing the importance of particular shifts of impression and perspective, with their often striking local effects, we need to be more attentive to these larger patterns or movements that affect an audience, providing rhythm and shape for the play's experience. Here I am thinking more of Bernard Beckerman's description of a play's action as "an intangible nexus of energies, or tension," or of Leonard Barkan's sense of a play's "emotional consistency" than of Daniel Seltzer's phrase, "units of narrative action"; that is, I am concerned with the play as a dynamic and rhythmic process of emotional pressure, a crafted system of tensions within the text.⁶ My prime case in point is the much debated response

⁶Beckerman, p. 98 and Seltzer, p. 169. Leonard Barkan, "The Theatrical Consistency of *Richard II*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), 5, argues for an analysis of theatrical causes and effects that will allow us "a way of seeing the play's totality that is at once true to the spirit of the work and susceptible to

problem in *Hamlet*: how an audience reacts (or should react) to those moments on stage when Hamlet acts as a killer. As Nigel Alexander has put it in a statement that could apply to characters and audience alike, "The play is more than a murder story: it is an examination of the kind of response provoked by murder . . . [a play] designed to provide intense and unusual possibilities of self-recognition."⁷

Each of the deaths inflicted by Hamlet must be interpreted both in its immediate context and in relation to the accumulated impressions that Shakespeare has crafted up to that point. Viewed in this way (as they are experienced in performance), the deaths of Polonius, Laertes, and Claudius involve sudden reactions by Hamlet to immediately compelling circumstances. They involve the violent release of tension that has been built up not only in Hamlet but in the audience as well. Further, our sense of Hamlet's guilt is minimized partly by this emotional relief and partly because Shakespeare manipulates us to feel each death as deserved.⁸

theatrical realization." For Barkan, the principal theatrical cause is "emotional consistency": "Dramatic action, besides being the raveling and unraveling of a fictional narrative, consists of a sequence of emotional responses, both among the characters on stage and between stage characters and members of the audience. In Shakespeare's dramas, these responses are ordered by a grand design: I call this design the play's 'consistency'" (5).

⁷Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play, and Duel: A Study in "Hamlet"* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), pp. 3-4. The range of response is extreme: e.g., Roy W. Battenhouse, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises* (Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 250, sees Hamlet degenerating to become "the minister . . . of a poisoned chalice . . . a fellow celebrant with Claudius in a Black Mass"; Michael Andrews uses sacramental imagery to reach an opposite conclusion, in "The Double-Death of Claudius in *Hamlet*," *Renaissance Papers*, 1970, pp. 21-27.

⁸In considering the role of visual symbols and analogues in *Hamlet*, Alan Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1977), claims that a gestural rendering of the murder of Priam is reiterated in the figure of Hamlet poised over Claudius at prayer, and in his bloody use of a sword to kill Polonius and, ultimately, Claudius. This recurrent, visual image is important "for establishing an ethical context for the question of revenge" (p. 93) in which "revenge upon a king is bloody, brutal, malicious, and hellish" (p. 65). By association, then, an audience would view Hamlet as a "tainted hero" who "has unwittingly taken on many of the attributes of a Pyrrhus, a revenging son 'roasted in wrath and fire' and 'o'er-sized with coagulate gore'" (p. 101). As much as Dessen's approach provides a necessary attention to the visual indicators of meaning in performance, I cannot agree with his conclusions. The Pyrrhus image exists, analogically, as a potential, as part of our peripheral (not focal) awareness of what is possible for the Hamlet character in

There are two principal sources of tension in the first part of the play. The first is the suppressed energy of the waiting revenger about which Michael Goldman has written.⁹ The second is the abrasive juxtaposition of contrary perceptions: on the one hand, our sense of Hamlet as deep, sincere, concerned with truth and the importance of what lies within, a rejecter of sham and artifice; on the other hand, our sense of his surrounding world, the world of Claudius and Polonius, with its contemptible, demeaning, and dangerous surfaces. The first tension, Hamlet's "blunted purpose" and his resultant anxiety and frustration, is kept before the audience by Hamlet's sullen mood, his oblique references to Claudius' spreading corruption, and his self-lacerating soliloquies. Shakespeare has exploited and shaped this emotional energy, displacing it through Hamlet's antic disposition, allowing him a number of performable aggressions that express his rage without draining his intensity. Although these sallies afford Hamlet an oblique expression of his moral rage and his frustration, they are nonetheless painfully unsatisfactory to him, precisely because the ultimate problem still remains.

Once the play is under way, Shakespeare pays more direct attention to the Elsinore world. But what is possible is not necessarily probable. The analogy does not fix Hamlet's identity; it remains suggestive. By turning a visual suggestion into an ethical equation, Dessen isolates one dramatic signifier from all of the other confluent elements of performance. Centering his reading more on Virgil than on Shakespeare, he ignores immediate contextual controls—e.g., Shakespeare emphasizes the old King's physical vulnerability and the excessive brutality of Pyrrhus, directing us to perceive the circumstances of Priam's death as unfair and excessive—and he supplies a highly selective assessment of the details of Polonius' and Claudius' murders that does not account for the sequential nature of dramatic impressions and their accumulated pressures on an audience's emotions. Dessen's reading assumes a conscious judgmental focus and emotional distance which Shakespeare's manipulation of the audience has not allowed; it also rests on a particular form of staging which is meant to present a rather exclusive idea about what and how the play means. cf. Bernard Beckerman's description of stage-centered reading as contextual, sequential, and dynamic: "It seizes on those portions of a work that convey significant interplay. It does not try to reduce a work to a central idea but to explore its motions," in "Explorations in Shakespeare's Drama," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), 141. One example of this method is Timothy W. Crusius, "Hamlet and Audience Response," *Hamlet Studies*, 1 (1979), 79-100. Although we agree on certain conclusions and share an interest in the relationship between textual stimuli and audience response, the trend of my argument is quite divergent from his.

⁹Michael Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 99: "Haunted by his complex, burdensome and galling task, the revenger carries with him a suffering always near to the surface, always pressing toward enactment, focusing in hate, bursting out in rage, but never—till the climax—capable of being fully released."

to the second, interrelated tension. We first sense a discordancy of perspective in 1.2, in Hamlet's insistence on the integrity of his appearances and in his tortured reflections on the shallowness of his mother's apparent affection for his dead father. It is confirmed for us in the next scene, certainly in the artificial prudential counsel and empty aphorisms of Laertes and Polonius, but more pointedly in their dismissive judgment of Hamlet as a youthful deceiver whose words of love are nothing more than the seductive flatteries of sexual appetite. What Ophelia refers to as Hamlet's "honorable fashion" and "holy vows of Heaven" are automatically rejected by Polonius as "mere implorators of unholy suits, / Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds / The better to [beguile]" (1.3. 111-31). This facile slander may be particularly distasteful to an audience precisely because it is so casual, so smugly self-certain, and because it is cast as presumption (or, as Ophelia hints about Laertes, transference) stated as absolute fact. In spite of the comic overtones of the first Polonius scene, there may be something decidedly galling for an audience in the spectacle of a superficial world, content in its obtuseness, branding as superficial the only character so far in the play who promises to be complex and sensitive. Shakespeare structurally underlines the emotional and moral opposition of these contrasting modes of experience by setting the pernicious sniping of Polonius and his filial echo against our deepening appreciation of Hamlet's significance. The moral abyss that is opened for Hamlet in the next two scenes effectively reminds us of the inescapable depths and potential darkness of human response, immersing us in exactly what the Elsinore world seeks to ignore or suppress.¹⁰

III

Several things are happening in the long sequence of dramatic impressions from the beginning of Act 2 to the performance of the Mouse-trap play. First of all, the Ghost's revelation and imposed task and Hamlet's resolve to rush to vengeance create for the audience expectations of crisis and action that are frustrated by the apparent delay and digressiveness of these scenes. Paradoxically, at the same time as Shakespeare defers action to increase tension, these scenes also show us why caution and obliqueness are necessary, even though they generate frustration for character and audience alike. In this sense, the scenes are

¹⁰Depending on what is seen as figure and ground, one could argue that the Ghost's revelation of guilt is framed and trivialized by two Polonius scenes (1.3 and 2.1). However, in terms of both dramatized focus and continuous time within the play, the first major dramatic segment begins and ends with the Hamlet world.

mimetic, dramatizing for us the indirections, the mazes, the crosscurrents of the Elsinore world: we must be made to feel that world with all its slippery turns and withheld certainties so that we share Hamlet's dislike. Shakespeare is giving us information and establishing attitudes that draw us closer to Hamlet and prepare us to understand his subsequent reactions and actions within an antagonistic environment.

In defining the Elsinore world (and, by contrast, Hamlet), Shakespeare presents a series of impressions whose common factor is spying. In successive dramatic segments, Polonius dispatches Reynaldo to pry into Laertes' life in France; Claudius engages Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to "glean" and "sift" Hamlet as to the cause of his "transformation," and then receives from Voltemand and Cornelius news of another uncle's successful probe of his nephew's appearances; Polonius reveals Hamlet's confidential letter of love to Ophelia (which, incidentally, is a testimony of his faithfulness and an appeal against doubt, however hackneyed its poetic form and expression) and brags that he "will find / Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed / Within the centre" (2.2.157-59); Polonius, then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in the inverse order of their engagement by Claudius, fail in their attempts to sound Hamlet, because he divines their intention and masters them at their own game; Hamlet designs his own probe to discover the King's secret thoughts; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report their failure to the King; Claudius and Polonius eavesdrop on the meeting of Hamlet and Ophelia, a meeting ironically baited with Ophelia's counterfeit prayers—from this the King emerges more watchful and concerned than before, and Polonius still insistent on his conventional judgment that unrequited love is the source of Hamlet's bizarre conduct; the King temporarily refrains from sending Hamlet to England and agrees to a second pre-arranged eavesdropping by Polonius, this time on Hamlet and his mother; and, finally, Hamlet achieves the only apparently successful probe of this sequence when the combination of staged action and his own critical glossing penetrate Claudius' reserve and goad him into a startled outburst—whether of guilt, or rage, or both, we can't be sure, even though Hamlet is eager to find his predisposition validated. Ironically, Hamlet's "success" is also his failure, since he had to reveal his secret knowledge in order to confirm it. Inadvertently, Hamlet has given Claudius what all of the King's delegated observations could not give him.

Although Hamlet's burdens of revenge and conscience and Claudius' guilt remain the ultimate problems for an audience, the dramatized focus on this sequence is the abortive snooping and poking to detect the

cause of Hamlet's "transformation." In direct proportion to our attachment to Hamlet and our acceptance of his duty to revenge, we are likely to experience this as interference with Hamlet and to feel our annoyance with the Elsinore world intensified. But what is more important is the way in which Shakespeare directs that resentment against Polonius. Polonius' instructions to Reynaldo, which begin this sequence, constitute a paradigm of the values and methods of the world around Hamlet. The scene establishes Polonius' habit of thinking the best of himself and the worst of others, including his own son, thus continuing the pattern of vilification begun in 1.3 against Hamlet.¹¹ It offers a prescriptive formulation of the world's reliance on subterfuge and the denigration of others; and it dramatizes the central disparity between Polonius' self-image as a man who is wise, perceptive, and self-knowing and our perception of him as dull, ignorant, and self-deceptive. This disparity may help to explain why we can take some pleasure in Hamlet's witty abuse of Polonius. Even after his encounters with Hamlet in which he is so obviously outclassed, Polonius persists in considering himself the only fox in the field.

As Susan Snyder has persuasively written, the character of Polonius has its roots in comic form; and she has much to say about how Polonius' comic irrelevance helps to define the tragic world of *Hamlet*, how his "total unawareness exacerbates our awareness."¹² A large part of that exacerbation has to do with Polonius' dramatic role, not just with what he says or does in particular scenes. As the embodiment of the values to which Hamlet is opposed and which, in turn, seek to demean him, Polonius becomes Hamlet's immediate and principal antagonist in these scenes. He is on stage for a little more than one half of the long second scene of Act 2 and is the only member of the court party to joust with Hamlet more than once in this sequence.¹³ Significantly, Shakespeare keeps Claudius in the background, removed from direct contact with Hamlet until the Mousetrap Play (although we are aware of Claudius lurking on the periphery during Hamlet's interview with Ophelia in 3.1). Polonius emerges as a focal point not only for what he is in

¹¹Hamlet seems to be playing instinctively on this aspect of Polonius when he counsels Polonius to treat the players "after your own honor and dignity—the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty" (2.2. 531-32).

¹²Susan Synder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 107-12; the quotation occurs on p. 109.

¹³Of the 605 lines in 2.2, Polonius is on stage for 336 lines, Hamlet for 437 lines. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are present during 369 lines, Shakespeare gives them smaller speaking roles and has them virtually silent when they share the stage with Polonius.

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himself but also because of the person he seeks to represent. We feel his presence everywhere—in his frequent comings and goings on stage, in his insistent poking into affairs that concern him little or not at all. We also notice how he willingly interposes himself between the King and Hamlet. In so far as an audience experiences Polonius as one of "baser nature" who "comes / Between the pass and fell incensed points / Of mighty opposites" (5.2.60-62), as one who prevents direct confrontation between the two principals, we are likely to perceive his death as dramatically necessary, to sense it as something that will precipitate the crisis and resolution which we desire.

IV

In the sequence of dramatic impressions leading from the King's alarmed exit to Polonius' murder, Shakespeare fashions an emotional crescendo that demands its own climax and release. He does this by accelerating the pace, exposing the audience to shorter, more frequently shifting impressions (approximately 10 in 252 lines) that set up the emotional pressure on us. He matches this augmented tension with a change in Hamlet's tone and mood. Hamlet is no longer politely, though sarcastically, tolerant of the interfering world around him. His patience at an end, and reassured by the King's reaction, he speaks now in bitter indictment of false friends and insolent officers.

The elated joking of Hamlet and Horatio (3.2.271-95) is a moment of intense relief (doubt, for Hamlet, has been removed). It is a moment of shared triumph (a small victory has apparently been won). It is a moment apart, before the necessity to act settles in again with the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Their arrival is a multiple signal to the audience: it reasserts the hypocritical world that plagues Hamlet; it intrudes upon the unguarded moment between Hamlet and Horatio, breaking Hamlet's mood, reactivating his defences, and reminding us that the Elsinore world does not tolerate open friendship and love of the kind Hamlet desires; it recalls for us Polonius' planned intrusion on the ostensibly private interview between mother and son that he had proposed at the end of 3.1; and it also reminds us of Gertrude's complicity, her impending violation of confidence at a primal level.¹⁴ The incomprehension of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the face of Hamlet's

¹⁴Although Gertrude is not present in 3.1 when Polonius first voices his plan to eavesdrop, her subsequent assurance that she will speak bluntly to Hamlet, as Polonius has instructed—"Pray you be round [with him]" (3.4.5), a verbal echo of 3.1.183—seems to mark her as a willing participant in Polonius' furtive design: "I'll [warr'nt] you, fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming" (3.4.6-7).

mocking courtesy and their renewed attempt to sound him under the pretense of friendship lead to Hamlet's undisguised contempt in the recorder scene. His closing assertion, "Call me what instrument you will, though you fret me, yet you cannot play upon me" (3.2.370-72), leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern silent and accompanies the entrance of Polonius. With striking dramatic economy, Shakespeare has used this articulate silence to underline the truth and impact of Hamlet's attack and to implicate Polonius in the rejection of those who demean Hamlet by thinking they can play upon him.

The incremental effect of these impressions can well be an intensification of the audience's frustration and latent anger against Polonius and the world he represents; and it is given voice in Hamlet's contemplation of bloody action and the verbal daggers with which he expects to penetrate to his mother's conscience (3.2.388-99). However, the audience's knowledge of what awaits Hamlet evokes an ironic perspective: we know that what Hamlet anticipates is not at all what Polonius and the Queen intend.

Shakespeare keeps up the pressure. Claudius is now wary of Hamlet's menace and has undertaken to remove him from Elsinore, implying that he expects little from Polonius. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's flattery of the King proves that they have learned nothing from Hamlet's censure; it associates them with the moral obtuseness of Polonius and confirms Hamlet's loathing of the "candied tongue" that "lick[s] absurd pomp" (3.2.60). The urgency of Hamlet's situation is further highlighted for the audience by Claudius' resolve to limit his nephew's freedom: "we will fetters put about this fear; / Which now goes too free-footed" (3.3.25-26) and by Polonius' anticipation of a mother's rebuke: "I warrant she'll tax him home" (3.3.29).

With the audience's attention directed to the impending interview between Hamlet and Gertrude, and beyond to Hamlet's departure for England, Shakespeare suddenly shifts to the image of an anguished king desperately seeking release from the burden of his guilt. No sooner have we begun to absorb our impression of Claudius' inner struggle, than he lapses into silent prayer and our attention is again redirected, now to the image of an aroused avenger poised over the vulnerable body of his antagonist and intended victim. The death of Claudius at this moment would seem to be the natural outcome of the pressures that Shakespeare has been accumulating. Instead, Shakespeare frustrates gratification for the protagonist and the audience by having Hamlet pass up his first real opportunity to kill the King.

According to Marjorie Garber and Michael Goldman, the increase of

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tension at this moment can be attributed to a conflict in the audience between representational and presentational perceptions, between a desire for Claudius' death and a recognition that the play is not ready for its finale.¹⁵ I think the audience's tension comes from a different conflict. Shakespeare's steady pressuring of the audience towards the need for release is offset by his manipulation of our perspective that makes it impossible for us to accept Hamlet's murder of Claudius at this point. Put simply, we do not desire Claudius' death. Shakespeare has so far dramatized the King's guilt, here and in the earlier aside, "O, 'tis too true! / How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!" (3.1.48-49), but we have not yet been made to feel Claudius' villainy. Rather we have been drawn closer to him and to his sense of inner conflict. The King clearly emerges here as the only character in the play to come close to the complexity of Hamlet's being; he is the only character apart from Hamlet whose inwardness we are shown in soliloquy. Through his attempt at self-examination, we experience in Claudius a certain sensitivity and a capacity to pose (but not respond to) valid moral questions, as well as the honest refusal to deceive himself in his recognition of the insufficiency of the "gilded hand" and the impossibility of "shuffling off" before God (3.3.36-72). Shakespeare matches this more inward perspective of Claudius with the emotional distancing from Hamlet occasioned by his harsher musings. For a brief moment, the introspective Claudius becomes more like Hamlet, and the ruthlessly calculating Hamlet, more like the Ghost's image of Claudius, the Claudius that Shakespeare has yet to stage for us. This temporary blurring of distinction between protagonist and antagonist makes this the wrong moment, emotionally and dramatically, for Claudius' death.

Although we accept the deferral of decisive action, our tension is not diminished. Shakespeare exploits the frustration of suppressed revenge in Hamlet's slaying of Polonius, whose nuisance and danger he *has* made us feel. Our perspective on Polonius' role—his moral blindness, his presumption, his intrusion in Hamlet's principal relationships, his blocking intermediary stance—allows us to accept his death. We are also emotionally prepared. Shakespeare has been building tension and withholding release, only to augment the tension. With the clash of expectations

¹⁵Goldman, p. 33; Marjorie Garber, "Shakespeare's 'Vassal' Actors: The Role of the Audience in Shakespearean Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1978), 80: "We, the audience, delay as well. Our fascination with Hamlet's character and the workings of his mind conflicts with our eagerness to see the deed done, to have him kill Claudius once and for all—for when he does this, there will be no more play."

between Hamlet and Gertrude, the explosion occurs. Each seeks to chide and instruct the other; both are shocked by the attitude and response they encounter. The Queen's threat to send for help, and Hamlet's forcible restraint of his mother until she look within, ignite in fear and anger whose intensity permits no intrusion. Polonius' pathetic and ill-timed interference simply triggers the suppressed violence in Hamlet and releases the orchestrated tension in the audience. Dramatically, Polonius' death, not Claudius', is the natural conclusion to the various pressures that Shakespeare's stagecraft has been exerting on the audience. Our reaction to his death is primarily emotional, only remotely rational and moral. In fact, until the end of the scene Shakespeare allows the audience scant time to reflect on Polonius' death.¹⁶ Hamlet's aroused energy carries through to his confrontation with Gertrude, so that we do not feel Polonius' death as the climax of the scene. Our attention is deflected away from Hamlet's act to his breaking of the Queen's will and forcing of her conscience, his assault on her dulled sensibilities, her "apoplex'd sense." Polonius is dead, but the self-ignorance of the Elsinore world lives on; so also does Claudius, as Shakespeare reminds us by having the Ghost recall Hamlet to his sworn obligation.¹⁷

V

With Polonius removed, Shakespeare brings Claudius to the foreground. An audience does not begin to feel a desire for his death, for a deserved retribution, until his "evil" is dramatized, until we experience

¹⁶Hamlet's sardonic dismissal of Polonius' death continues that emotional distancing from an aggressive and callous Hamlet that is part of Shakespeare's complex characterization of his protagonist. At the same time, Shakespeare creates a balancing effect by having Hamlet's language, rife with puns, reactivate our sense of a petty and conniving world: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room. / Mother, good night indeed. This counsellor / Is now most still, most secret, and most grave, / Who was in life a foolish prating knave. / Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you." 3.4.212-16). Similarly, the insistent references to Polonius' corpse in the first three scenes of Act 4 and the King's covert plans for Hamlet's execution create offsetting effects for an audience.

¹⁷The climax of 3.4 occurs more naturally at line 101 when the Queen cries, "No more!", and the Ghost enters to control and redirect Hamlet's rage. Shakespeare subsequently introduces the character, Osric, into the play to demonstrate that triviality and affectation have not disappeared with the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. These qualities seem indigenous to the court of Claudius and are another sign to the audience of what the King represents in contrast to Hamlet.

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his plotting against Hamlet and sense Hamlet's danger. We hear of Claudius' plans for Hamlet's death in 4.3. After they have failed, we witness Claudius and Laertes' yearning for murder that will recognize no limits, no sanctuary (4.7.124-28), and that will achieve itself in a triple treachery—an unbaited and poisoned sword, a poisoned chalice—that preys on Hamlet's trusting nature: "He, being remiss, / Most generous, and free from all contriving, / Will not peruse the foils" (4.7.134-36). This differentiation of Hamlet's virtuous nature and the venomous deceit of Claudius (even Laertes is his victim) is maintained and emphasized in the final scene, so that when Hamlet kills Claudius, his action is felt by the audience as an emotional imperative. The image of Hamlet as contaminated revenger, as one of the play's several poisoners, is at best secondary.¹⁸

We come to the duel scene knowing fully, as Hamlet does not, the danger that awaits him, just as we had been prepared for the Closet scene by our awareness of Polonius' persistent intrusion and Gertrude's betrayal of trust. We want Hamlet to win against the odds and fear that he will not. Once the combat begins, Shakespeare disallows moral judgments through the compelling haste of the scene. Again he exploits a series of tensions: the tension of the first two passes, as Hamlet skilfully wards off certain death; of Gertrude's drinking from the poisoned cup, as Claudius watches helplessly, sensing that circumstances are now beyond his control and time is running out; of Laertes' urge to strike unfairly before the Queen's death reveals his and Claudius' treachery, and his almost immediate twinge of conscience, spoken in an aside (5.2.296); of the third pass, played out against the mounting odds which threaten Hamlet and against the background of the Queen's imminent death. When Laertes cannot succeed within the terms of the contest—ironically, they have already been violated in secret—his frustration, anger, and fear impel him to thrust, apparently while Hamlet's guard is down.

¹⁸Robert F. Willson Jr., *Shakespeare's Opening Scenes*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature (Universitat Salzburg, 1977), p. 113, writes that with the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Hamlet "becomes tainted by the world Claudius has created" and that he is "near the monarch in the scale of treachery. He cannot escape the effects of the disease in the final duelling scene." Willson does not consider the extremity of Hamlet's danger, the necessity for self-defence, and the fact that Hamlet's account to Horatio comes after we have experienced Claudius' plotting with Laertes. Like Dessen, Willson provides a partial reading of the play's final scene. See Philip Edwards, "Tragic Balance in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Survey*, 36 (1983), 43-52, for a discussion of the disinclination in the twentieth century to sympathize with Hamlet, particularly his comments on the "moral levelling" that removes any sense from the "idea of authorized violence," "a violence which purifies, and is acceptable" (48-49).

Hamlet's immediate response is to retaliate in kind. Significantly, he is not aware of the sword's hidden potency; he is simply repaying one sharp thrust with another. Successive dramatic impressions now occur so rapidly as to seem almost simultaneous. The Queen swoons; there is general confusion among the courtiers; Gertrude announces that she has been poisoned; Hamlet cries for the chamber to be sealed; Laertes confesses his own treachery, intensifying the sense of urgency in Hamlet and in the audience by proclaiming Hamlet's certain death; then Laertes accuses the King.

All the while, Claudius has been sitting apart as others die for him. This stage image of the aloof and secretive King, cast in relief by the frenetic activity around him, is a means of focusing the audience's resentment of this user of people, this silent manipulator who takes none of the immediate risks.¹⁹ As Hamlet reverses the treachery of the now isolated and exposed Claudius, he is responding to Laertes' public confession and to his own deep anger at his mother's death and the death-wound he has suffered. We, in turn, tend to feel a sense of rightness. With "not half an hour's life" (5.2.315) remaining, Hamlet must strike now; and as Hamlet stabs and forces Claudius to drink the poison, Shakespeare calls into play the full weight of the audience's frustration and indignation that has been aroused by indirection, dishonesty, callousness, and lethargic surfaces.

At the moment of the King's death, Shakespeare has Laertes comment, in a grisly pun, "He is justly served" (5.3.327), and has him exchange forgiveness with Hamlet:

Laertes Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me! [Dies.]

Hamlet Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.

(5.2.330-32)

Laertes' absolution of Hamlet is a clear response indicator that we too are meant to understand and pardon Hamlet and, by implication, to center the blame on Claudius. Our sense of vindication is then confirmed in the formal social recognition, albeit incomplete, of Hamlet's worth. Laertes' attitude of understanding and forgiveness is a natural conclu-

¹⁹This image of Claudius has already been planted for us in Hamlet's description of Rosencrantz as the King's sponge: "But such officers do the King best service in the end: he keeps them, like an apple, in the corner of his jaw, first mouth'd, to be last swallow'd. When he needs what you have glean'd, it is but squeezing you, and, spunge, you shall be dry again" (4.2.16-21).

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sion to the forms and pressures that Shakespeare has been shaping in his play. It is an attitude deeply embodied in the play's action, both gestural and linguistic. Only when we begin to subdivide the play's necessary questions in an analytic mode detached from the rhythms of performance can we begin to indulge ourselves, somewhat self-protectively, in moral censure.

VI

An audience's sense of what happens in a play, especially a Shakespearean play, is more than a recognition that particular characters have performed or endured particular acts in particular words. What we see is also influenced by what we are made to see. For example, we are introduced to the love of Romeo and Juliet through the divisive forces that would keep them apart. Similarly, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* begin with contrary impressions, emphasizing the values against which the protagonists must define their loves and themselves. In each case, we are drawn to perceive a love relationship in terms of opposition.²⁰ Shakespeare establishes perceptual tension from the outset; the working out of that kind of tension dramatically, through a deliberate sequence of impressions that intensifies before it resolves, comprises the peculiar life of each play.

An audience's full engagement with a play and its central tensions, serious or comic, will be molded by the rhythms of performance which, in turn, are closely allied with the successive and synthetic nature of temporal experience in drama. No matter how imposing a given dramatic moment, it does not come to us as single and isolated. This is particularly true of Shakespearean drama, where the calculated shifting of impressions not only determines but repeatedly challenges and qualifies our perspective. Consider Hamlet's sudden and angry turn on Ophelia in 3.1, with its ironic quibble on the word "nunn'ry." In his question "are you honest?" and in his subsequent conditional "if you be honest" (3.1.102 and 106), Hamlet sets before Ophelia alternative interpretations and courses of action. If she is virtuous, she should seek refuge from the world's corruption; if she is tainted, she should do penance for her sins. Hamlet's bitter tone and his images of woman's hypocrisy seem verbally to enact a choice, even though the ambivalent refrain, "To a nunn'ry, go," and its variations apparently leave Ophelia to her own

²⁰Shakespeare employs a similar technique in Sonnet CXVI where he induces tension by defining "the marriage of true minds" negatively in two quatrains that structurally frame the quatrain of positive metaphors.

conscience. But Hamlet's posed question also confronts the audience. How do we respond to Ophelia? And how does that response reflect on Hamlet? The nature of our response will be incremental, drawing instinctively on the multiple impressions already activated by Shakespeare's scenic design. Do we see Ophelia's surrendering of Hamlet's "remembrances" as one of a series of betrayals—a duplicitous mother, false friends, a dishonest love—and sympathize with Hamlet who is increasingly alone with his pain and his rage in a treacherous world? Is she the instance that proves Hamlet's generalizations about women? Is she an all-too-obedient offspring (like Laertes and unlike other Shakespearean daughters) following a socially approved direction, as Hamlet does not? Or do we understand Ophelia's action, as Hamlet cannot, because we have seen Polonius with the King's authority exacting behavior from his daughter; and do we thus sense the pain of her dilemma, divided as she is in her love and her allegiance? Do we perhaps note a parallel, remarking ironically that here is a daughter compelled, as is the son Hamlet, to follow a father's will? To what extent do we wonder about the sensibility of Hamlet, a man whose inner depths surpass trivial show, yet a man who is quick to judge others according to effects and outward signs? Our response to this dramatic moment is deepened and complicated by what Shakespeare has shown us and made us feel to this point in the play.

The same is true of the deaths for which Hamlet is directly responsible. In *Hamlet*, as in the other plays, Shakespeare's dramatic method creates a reflexive system of meaning that insistently disallows simple intellectual judgment and moral censure. This is not to suggest that the play cannot engage us intellectually and morally; but I am arguing that these more abstract patterns of response tend to dominate retrospective considerations, while in the theater we are more likely to be caught up in the emotional energies of the play and the kinetic force of performance. Through the accumulation and interplay of dramatic impressions, Shakespeare's text leads us into a mode of experience that is allusive, inferential, and deeply textured rather than declarative. These unfolding impressions also establish the particular pattern of progression and resistance that gives the action of *Hamlet* its unique form. In this way, we are drawn to the play's necessary questions through a strong emotional impetus, an effective tension that demands the release of forceful action while preserving the possibility that we might understand and accept a complex and tainted protagonist.

NOTES

Hamlet's Bellerophontic Letters

ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive at the English court, they deliver a bellerophontic letter to the king. That is, the missive contains instructions to do harm to the person who delivers it. Whether Shakespeare was conscious of the mythic source for this device remains an unanswered question, but Belleforest compares his protagonist to the Greek hero whose name provided the eponymic title for the letter.

In reading of this history, it seemeth, Hamlet should resemble another Hercules, sent into divers places of the world by Euristheus (solicited by Juno) where he knew any dangerous adventure . . . or else Bellerophon sent to Ariobatus to put him to death.¹

That this source story, and Saxo's as well, treat Hamlet as a Herculean figure is at least partially exemplified by the story surrounding Claudius' (Fengon's) treacherous epistle. Shakespeare, however, creates a tragic figure who is akin to the Machiavellian rather than the Greek heroic type. *His* Hamlet lets his school friends go unwittingly to their fate rather than approaching the English king, impressing him with his princely virtues, and enlisting his aid in destroying Fengon's (Claudius') servants before returning to Denmark.² In addition Shakespeare, emphasizing the self-destructive anger in his protagonist, has him devise his own bellerophontic letter which, by sending to Claudius, he effectively seals his own fate. The myth behind this prop and Shakespeare's two uses—one plot-serving, the other ironic—of it shed light on Hamlet's machiavellism, a quality that taints the play's tragic mood.

According to Greek legend, Bellerophon, grandson of Sisyphus, was a house guest at the court of Proteus, king of Argos, when he was solicited by Antea, Proteus' oversexed wife. After Bellerophon courteously refused her advances, Antea sought revenge by informing her husband that their young visitor had attempted to seduce her. Believing his wife's account, but restrained by the code of hospitality, Proteus sent Bellerophon

¹"The Hystorie of Hamblet," in Sir Israel Gollancz, ed., *The Sources of "Hamlet"* (Oxford, 1926; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1967), p. 287.

²"Hystorie," p. 249.

phon to his father-in-law Iobates, king of Lycia, with a letter praising the young man but requesting that he be put to death. But Iobates too was reluctant to kill his guest and instead set an impossible task for him: the slaying of the fabled monster Chimera. With the aid of the goddess Minerva, Bellerophon managed to capture and tame Pegasus, then employ the winged horse's power to surprise Chimera and destroy her.³

While this fable clearly served an allegorical and moral aim—the power of music or poetry defeats the beast in nature through the ingenuity of the poet-hero—for the Greeks, for Shakespeare it provided the outline for the episode involving Claudius' letter of execution sent with his messengers and stepson to the English king. Hamlet as Bellerophon is suspected not of seducing a wife but of knowing the king's terrible secret. Through an accident of course Hamlet discovers the contents of the letter, altering it so that the plotters are trapped by their own device. This same ingenuity will be required to overcome the chimeric evil that Claudius has come to represent in the play.

But Hamlet is a tragic figure whose actions seem alternately inspired by ingenuity and anger. To underscore this latter trait, Shakespeare invents a situation in which his protagonist writes a second bellerophonic letter that condemns him to death. Almost immediately after slipping the trap set for him by Claudius' letter, Hamlet loses the advantage by forewarning Claudius of his return to Denmark. The message has the same antic style that Hamlet employed before he was sent away, moreover, giving Claudius more "evidence" of the prince's madness that he can use in enlisting Laertes' aid:

"High and mighty. You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes, when I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet."

(4.7.43-48)⁴

Like a Greek wanderer-hero (note "set naked on your kingdom"), Hamlet introduces himself as if he were a much-travelled guest full of many tales of adventure. In fact, this missive gives his enemy ample time to plot the final duel / trap that will destroy him; his temptation to indulge in vengefully ironic warnings proves fatal. Shakespeare's own ironic purposes are served by having the intended victim compose the bellerophonic

³Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), I, 252-256.

⁴This quotation is from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974).

phontic letter by which his enemy gains the upper hand.

This letter likewise conforms to the pattern of overreaching behavior that Hamlet has indulged in throughout the action.⁵ His production of "The Murder of Gonzago" achieves the goal of pricking Claudius' conscience, but Hamlet exults in the guilty reaction of his victim instead of taking his revenge. The impulsive act of stabbing at a "rat" lurking behind the arras in his mother's room, coming as it does after his diatribe against *her* blindness and carnality, likewise highlights Hamlet's irrationality. The bellerophontic letter he sends to Claudius is thus one additional piece of evidence pointing to the contradictory nature of the hero: his ingenuity is tied to a blundering, self-seducing emotionalism.

⁵No critic I am familiar with has identified Claudius' letter—or Hamlet's—as a bellerophontic missive. J. Dover Wilson's comment in *What Happens in "Hamlet"* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), p. 258, seems to typify the critical literal-mindedness on this subject: "When such missions [Claudius' sending Hamlet to England] were undertaken by great personages, royal princes and the like, it was customary for the sealed commission in charge of some trusty gentleman or gentlemen to be sent in advance."

Sallust, Beasts That "Sleep and Feed," and *Hamlet*, 5.2

CLIFFORD J. RONAN

Few renaissance explorations of the *Vita Activa* are more stirring than *Hamlet*'s condemnation of indecision and fusty "Bestial oblivion":

What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unus'd. Now whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th'event—
.
I do not know
Why yet I live to say this thing's to do

(4.4.33-44)¹

One influence upon this high-pitched, philosophical speech (and 1.2.150ff: "O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason") has been rightly discovered near the opening of Cicero's *Offices*, where the bestial life, with its totally physical needs and its lack of concern for past and future, is contrasted with the thoughtful recollection and rational planning proper to the life of man. "Nature," writes Cicero, "has endowed every living creature with the instinct of . . . self-preservation" and "avoid[ance of] . . . injury"; with sexual appetite, protectiveness towards its young, and the urge to find

food, shelter, and the like [*ut pastum, ut latibula, ut alia generis eiusdem*]. . . . But the most marked difference between man and beast is this: the beast, just as far as it is moved by the senses and with very little perception of past or future [*praeteritum aut futurum*], adapts itself to that alone which is present at the moment; while man—because he is endowed with reason, by which he comprehends the chain of consequences, perceives the causes of things, understands the relation of cause to effect and of effect to cause

¹*Hamlet* is cited throughout this essay in Harold Jenkins' Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1982).

[*consequentia . . . praegressus et . . . antecessiones*], draws analogies, and connects and associates the present and the future [*praesentibus . . . atque futuras*]²—easily [*facile*] surveys the course of his whole life and makes the necessary preparations for its conduct.

(I. iv)³

Cicero uses no fewer than three pairs of terms to emphasize the contrasting pair of time periods, past and future; and his insistent wording is thus likely to have inspired Hamlet's reference to man's capacity to look "before and after."

It must be added, however, that the Prince could never share Cicero's cheery confidence that one can assess one's life and take action "easily" (*facile*). Neither does the Cicero of this passage speak of man's mind as godlike, though one scholar, Rolf Soellner, suggests that renaissance editorial glosses would have established this point.³ Soellner further claims that Cicero is the source of Hamlet's lively hint of the dull man's "market[ing]" and expending his time in mere "feed[ing]." True enough, Cicero does include *pastum* (fodder, herbage, food)⁴ in the long list of life's necessities. But nowhere does Cicero speak of sleep, which Shakespeare epigrammatically combines with a food reference to make a twin symbol for physicality.

In these regards, no one seems ever before to have called attention to the work of another ancient author, almost as available and prestigious as Cicero, and again writing upon the theme of man: Sallust, at the start of his history of Cicero, Cato, Caesar, and the conspiracy of Catiline, the *Bellum Catilinae*, Sallust not only mentions eating but couples it, as Shakespeare does, with sleep alone. In addition, the *Bellum Catilinae* contains several more hitherto unremarked analogues to *Hamlet*—analogues closer than any in the *Offices* passage—with special bearing on Shakespeare's themes of sloth, deliberation, and action, and of fame and story telling.

²Walter Miller's Loeb ed. and trans., Cicero, *De Officiis* (London: William Heinemann, 1938).

The Ciceronian origins of 4.4 and 1.2.150 are argued by Jenkins, pp. 528, 438-439. Rolf Soellner, *Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-knowledge* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1972), explains the verbal parallels in even greater detail, and uses renaissance texts to do so, pp. 387-389.

³Soellner, p. 388.

⁴Before glossing the Latin, I consulted Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879).

I

Successful demonstration seems never to have been made of Shakespeare's use of Sallust in any play, though T. W. Baldwin says that this author was often recommended for sixteenth-century grammar schools.⁵ Sallust is fully as sententious and philosophic as Cicero, and exemplifies the spare, angular, pithy style almost as well as Cicero does the balanced, copious, orotund one. The Sallust passage under consideration is just as visible as the one in Cicero, being alike a part of the introduction to a major work. Shakespeare could as easily have encountered the opening of the one work as the other, either when he attended (and/or taught in) school, or when he browsed at printers or in the libraries of friends.

The essential proof of Shakespeare's use of Sallust here—and perhaps of any further links between the two authors—now depends upon only one thing: the similarity of Hamlet's two infinitives "to sleep and feed" to Sallust's two nouns "*ventri atque somno*," belly and sleep. To reiterate, Cicero, in the passage under consideration, never once mentions

⁵T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944) documents the wide use of Sallust in the schools; see especially I.381-91, II.563-69, and Index II.765. Wisely rejecting the suggestion of the eighteenth-century scholar Theobald that Sallust's extremely general remarks on honor and forgiveness in *Bellum Catilinae* LI underlie *Cor.* 5.3.154, Baldwin says that this seems to be "the only parallel [ever] offered" between the historian and the dramatist (II.569). With only one exception, no other specific parallels between Shakespearean and Sallustian phraseology have reached the standard MLA bibliographies; or Lewis Walker's exhaustive list of works dating 1973-82, privately printed for the Shakespeare Association of America 1984 seminar on "Shakespeare and the Classics"; or, again, John W. Velz's essential *Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition: A Critical Guide to Commentary, 1660-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968). The exception is Hermann Conrad's dubious suggestion that the blood rituals of *JC* 3.1 derive primarily not from deer hunting but Sallust's description of Catiline's blood pact with his co-conspirators; see *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, 25 (1895), 380-382, and Velz, p. 200. Search for comment on Shakespeare's use of Sallust proves fruitless also in four other standard works: Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957-75); Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Percy Simpson, "Shakespeare's Use of Latin Authors," *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 1-63; and J. A.K. Thomson, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (1952; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966).

The *Bellum Catilinae* text and trans. cited below is, unless stated otherwise, the Loeb *Sallust*, ed. and trans. J.C. Rolfe (London: William Heinemann, 1921).

sleep, but Sallust and Shakespeare do. Shakespeare seems merely to be rearranging Sallust's paired items, as if to make a chiasmus with their original; and the dramatist raises the level of diction of the word *ventri* (belly) as if to bring it more in line with the Prince's suddenly returning aspiration to heroic dignity.

The opening sentences of *Bellum Catilinae*, and related lines that follow one or two paragraphs later, contrast a proper human life with the silent, unnoticed, belly-centered subsistence of mere beasts. Sallust develops the theme in ways more closely anticipating Shakespeare than the Cicero passage does. Unlike Cicero, Sallust emphasizes not only sleep (and its twin, feeding) but also the horrible fate of silence, the need for eternizing fame, and the opposition of bestial obliviousness with man's godlike reason. The Sallust passage is a long one, but if only because it forms a classic proto-existential thought, it is worth quoting *in extenso* in two languages:

Omnis homines . . . decet ne vitam silentio transeant veluti pecora, quae natura prona atque ventri oboedientia finxit . . . animi imperio . . . utimur; . . . nobis cum dis . . . commune est. Quo mihi rectius videtur ingeni quam virium opibus gloriam quaerere, et . . . memoriam nostri quam maxime longam efficere; nam divitiarum et formae gloria fluxa atque fragilis est, virtus clara aeternaque habetur. (I.1-3) . . . Sed multi mortales diditi ventri atque somno . . . vitam sicuti peregrinantes transiere; quibus profecto contra naturam corpus voluptati, anima oneri fuit. Eorum ego vitam mortemque iuxta aestumo, quoniam de utraque siletur. Verum enimvero is demum mihi vivere atque frui anima videtur, qui aliquo negotio intentus praeclari facinoris aut artis bonae famam quaerit.

(II.8-9)

It behooves all men . . . not to pass through life *unheralded* [*ne . . . silentio*], like the *beasts* [literally "cattle" or "herd animals"], which Nature has fashioned groveling and slaves to the *belly* [*ventri*]. [Our] . . . mind . . . we have in common with the Gods . . . Therefore I find it becoming, in seeking renown, that we should employ the resources of the intellect . . . to the end that . . . we may make the memory of our lives as long as possible. For the renown which riches or beauty confer is fleeting and frail; mental excellence is a splendid and lasting possession. (I.1-4) . . . [M]any men, being slaves to *appetite and sleep* [*ventri atque somno*], have passed through life . . . like mere wayfarers ["drifters," *peregrinantes transiere*, or possibly

"resident aliens"] I consider the lives and deaths of such men as about alike, since *no record is made* [*siletur*] of either. In very truth that man alone lives and makes the most of life, as it seems to me, who devotes himself to some occupation, courting the fame of a glorious deed or a noble career.

(II.8-9)

If one's care is simply for sleep and food, and if one's name is never sounded, one is not alive, one has never lived, one lacks immortality. Life and death equally become matters of *silentio* (silence), rather than of *fama, clara aeterna, gloria, memoria*. Sallust's continual emphasis on words signifying fame, the echoing of its antonym in the words *silentio* (I.1) and *siletur* (II.8), and the straightforward repetition of *ventri* (I.1, II.8) connect these two sentences tightly and increase the likelihood that Shakespeare would have been attentive to their presentation of this great ancient commonplace.

II

Anyone concluding that Shakespeare probably borrowed the phrase "sleep and feed" from Sallust's emphatic reference to *ventri atque somno* will be ready to reconsider questions of other indebtedness of *Hamlet* to this Roman author.

The occasion of Sallust's preface is an apology for historiography, in particular for his own treatise, written after he had spent some time in retirement subsequent to abandoning his unsuccessful (and probably tawdry) careers in politics and the military. The essence of Sallust's theme, stated or implicit, is that the words of a good military historian are valuable for four reasons. They provide practical information for those who are now leading the heroic, active life; they inspire the ideals needed for the choice of such lives; they guarantee earthly immortality to such heroes; and, finally, they confer on the literary craftsman an immortality approaching that of a great statesman or general.

In discussing the first of these aims, Sallust touches on the transmutation of thought into action, mentioning the reciprocal relationship between the two and the need for the movement from thought into action to be "prompt" (*mature*):

for a long time mortal men have discussed the question whether success in arms depends more on strength of body or excellence of mind: for before you begin, deliberation is necessary, *when you have*

deliberated, prompt action. Thus each of these, being incomplete in itself, requires the other's aid.

(I.5-7)

Altogether, the Sallust treatment of deliberation and action avoids the simplistic optimism of the corresponding set of remarks in Cicero's *Offices*. Therefore the Sallust is a little closer to the substance and pained tone of Hamlet's continual contrasts between his own delaying and the heroic reactions he assigns to characters living and dead—his father, Hercules, the Player, and so forth.

On the subject of those whom fame bypasses, Sallust's views, though admittedly less tragic than the Prince's, may well have contributed to their formulation. Sallust is merely supercilious towards those who refuse to acquire fame-conferring excellence. Hamlet, by contrast, vacillates between scorn and sorrow. He has scorn for his own highly developed powers of reflection and for the meaningless excellence of others: for instance, Claudius' in politics, and lawyers' and courtly ladies' in the amassing of power and wealth. A measure of sympathy and outraged sorrow he reserves for such whose deserved fame for excellence now suffers violation or eclipse: Caesar's clay, Yorick's brainpan, or his own father's memory.

Hamlet needs a world that remembers. Looking "before and after" while awaiting doomsday, he commemorates Alexander and Caesar as well as Abel and the Savior, and knows what the spiritual importance is of sympathetic tears for Hecuba. Portraits like these out of history join the living examples of Fortinbras and Laertes to provide Hamlet with "the image of [his own] cause" (5.2.77-78), a spacious glass with whose aid he hopes to descry, and mobilize, himself.

III

Besides its brilliant condemnation of mediocrities and nonentities, Sallust's preface is notable for its affirmation of the power and glory of letters—of which historiography, like drama, once formed a major province.

It is glorious [*Pulchrum*] to serve one's country by deeds [*bene facere*]; even to serve her by words [*bene dicere*] is not a thing to be despised; one may become famous [*clarum*] in peace as well as in war. Not only those who have acted, but those also who have recorded the acts of others [*Et qui fecere et qui facta aliorum scripsere*] oftentimes receive our approbation [*laudantur*]. And for myself, al-

though I am well aware that by no means equal repute [*gloria*] attends the narrator and the doer [*scriptorem et actorem*] of deeds, yet I regard the writing of history as one of the most difficult of tasks.

(III.1-2)

The reason Sallust gives for an author's (*scriptor's*) greater trials than even a doer's (*actor's*) are threefold, and quite likely to be of interest to Shakespeare the writer / actor: namely, the need for linguistic style and decorum, and the difficulty of surmounting the average reader's prejudice that no blame can be impartial and that no high praise can be credible.

It is interesting to see these points in the language of Shakespeare's London. A few years after the stage success of Shakespeare's play, another dramatist, Thomas Heywood, translated the Sallust passage discussed—and might even have recycled Fortinbras' word "passage" (5.2.403):

it is a most difficult task, by writing to represent the Actions of great Personages. First for that words and stile ought to equalize [*exaequanda*] their deeds. Secondly, for that many men are of opinion, that the reprehension of faults proceedeth from Spleene or Envy; whereas in recitall of the Vertues and generous *passages* of good men, every one according to his slender capacity, opinionating the facility of performance, giveth the beliefe, but what is more, or goeth beyond his incredulous understanding, he reputeth false, and therefore fabulous.

(I. Proeme)⁶

Whether Heywood's "passages" comes from Fortinbras or not, the above selection from Sallust is sensitive to the problems of using literature to make men better—just as the self-reflexive ending of *Hamlet* is. At the tragedy's conclusion, Horatio and Fortinbras are cast, respectively, as narrator / advocate / historian, and playwright / stage-director. Like Prospero, Holofernes, Puck, or Paulina in their diverse ways, Horatio and Fortinbras act out Shakespeare's own professional functions for his own benefit and ours.

Struggling inconclusively to exclaim "O, I could tell you—," the hero must delegate Horatio as his, in effect, *scriptor*. Before surrendering

⁶Charles Whibley's ed. in the Tudor Translations: Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline and the War of Jugurtha*, trans. Thomas Heywood (1608; New York: AMS Press, 1967), pp. 57-58.

his "dying voice" to the "silence" of the grave, Hamlet the Dane must see that his country, his family, and he himself become resounding "name[s]." Their cases, or "cause[s]," must be "Report[ed] . . . aright" (a word with a whisper of a pun on *write*):

Report me and my cause aright

To the unsatisfied.

.....

O God, Horatio, what a wounded *name*,
Things standing thus *unknown*, shall I leave behind me.

.....

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

.....

To *tell my story*.

(5.2.342-54)

Throughout *Hamlet*, Shakespeare alludes to the great homeland of *fama*, Rome—its founder Aeneas, its arch-hero Caesar, its arch-villain Nero, and so forth.⁷ In 5.2, Hamlet's refusal to let Horatio die is made a rejection of one sort of Roman identity in favor of what Shakespeare, at least, may have felt was one of another kind. Disallowed to play the "antique Roman" and to die with his commander like the self-immolating lieutenant Titinius in the author's recent *Julius Caesar*, Horatio must trade the role of *actor* for that of *scriptor* or "story"—"tell[er]," and stay yet longer as wordsmith in this distracted Globe.

Horatio's task, a literary one, is, of course, actually fulfilled by the artist, who creates Hamlet's story and gives it meaning through portrayal of heroic "Vertues and generous passages." By means of the convenient fiction of a Horatio, Shakespeare pictures himself as pained, realistic, dutiful transmitter of tragic ideals—a historian of the spirit,

⁷See 2.2.442 for Aeneas; 1.1.117, 3.2.102, 5.1.206 for Julius Caesar; 3.2.385 for Nero. "Polonius" is a Latin name, as is "Claudius"; see 1.2.1 SD. Too, 2.2.196 ("the satirical rogue") seems to refer to Juvenal (though Jenkins rejects this identification). The prominence of Rome in *Ham.* seems due to more than the afterglow of a play on Caesar (Sallust's mentor, by the way). Lucan, like his uncle Seneca a victim of Nero's, may be just below the surface in some speeches of the play: Thomson, at least, sees the Hecuba speech as "pure Lucan" (p. 231); and in *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 276-277, Emrys Jones maintains that this passage is not only Lucanic but must be seen in connection with the strong parallels between the Danish and Roman princely houses, a matter developed most fully by William Montgomerie, "'More an Antique Roman than a Dane,'" *Hibbert Journal*, 59 (1960), 67-77. [Editor's note: For the suggestion that "the satirical rogue" is Mateo Aleman, author of *The Rogue*, see *HST* 6, 68-71.]

who must find the words that equal the deeds. The results should have cheered the heart of a Sidney, had he lived long enough to see or read what the Quartos call "*The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet.*"

On the basis of the Prince's echo of Sallust's scornful reference to those who are fixated on *ventri atque somno*, it would appear that Shakespeare knew Sallust and let him help inspire not only the haunting soliloquy of 4.4 but also the immensely suggestive dialogue of 5.2. The pattern is cyclical. A solemn "rite," or ritual round, is set up whereby literature records, authenticates, and re-originate virtuous action. What Hamlet does reflects the Western tradition of heroism, and is triggered by numerous lives and stories—Fortinbras's and Pyrrhus's, Alexander's and Laertes's. And in turn Hamlet's actions produce Horatio's words and deeds, which again instigate what Prince Fortinbras thinks, says, and does. As terminus of the cycle within the play, the Norwegian Prince becomes a new incarnation of Hamlet—and yet also, like Horatio, of the playwright as well. For each sets himself the task of inspiring audiences' minds and wills in a lofty direction; each manages those "passage[s]" that "Speak loudly" for a man on the "stage[s]" of this world—political, military, literary.

Let four captains

Bear Hamlet *like a soldier* to the stage,
For he was *likely*, had he been *put on*,
To have prov'd most *royal*; and for his *passage*,
The soldier's *music and the rite* of war
Speak loudly for him.

(5.2.400-05)

The report of the "loudly" reverberating guns and the music of Hamlet's martial passage compensate for, right the wrongs of, Claudius' bestial drinking ritual of Act 1. But these sounds may also echo, and do homage to, one of the first writers who objected memorably to bestial passivity, to the life passed oblivious to fame—in "silence."

Degrees of Psychopathology in *Hamlet*

MARGUERITE M. VEY-MILLER

RONALD J. MILLER

The theme of psychopathology in *Hamlet* has been discussed by numerous critics who offer various interpretations of the forms madness takes in the characters of Ophelia and Hamlet. Both Ophelia and Hamlet exhibit symptoms of madness, but quite differently. Ophelia is clearly deranged with little reasoning evident in her behavior. Hamlet's case is more perplexing. Shakespearean scholars have debated at length whether Hamlet was truly mad or feigning madness. References to the text support both theories, and it seems impossible to insist that any one interpretation is the only one that can be correct.

According to T. Lidz, Shakespeare uses the theme of madness "to convey the disillusionment and despair that pervades the character and leads them to rash, self-destructive acts and to express the dissolution of their world."¹ This is certainly so, but the genius of Shakespeare's treatment of madness perhaps lies primarily in his insight into what have become accepted categories and causes of psychopathology in modern times. Modern neurology and psychiatry have taught us that derangement has a variety of manifestations and causes. The Elizabethan image held that madness was a result of witchcraft or sin. Elizabethans also saw madness as a loss of one's reason, or passion uncontrolled by reason.² Burton's 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy* identifies witches and magicians as frequently causing melancholy, "to satisfy their revenge or lust." Individuals were generally thought affected by melancholy through the use of charms, images, amulets, wands, etc. Burton cites examples in which melancholy was caused in a most grievous manner by touch alone. One case of melancholy is described by Burton as due to partly natural and partly magical causes "because he vomited pieces of iron and lead and spoke such language as he had never been taught."³ Shakespeare was not writing for the modern Freudian savant but for Elizabethans who lacked systematic, sophisticated, clinical observations of madness. However, Shakespeare had insight into at least three levels of severity of psychopathology which were conceptually beyond Elizabethan era awareness. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents three perceptions, making a variety of psychopathology central in the construction

¹Theodore Lidz, M.D., *Hamlet's Enemy* (New York: Basic Books, 1975, p. 33. [Editor's note: reviewed, *HSt*, 1, 62-65]

²Lidz, p. 34.

³Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1964 (originally published 1621), Vol. 1, pp. 202-206.

of the play.

The first of the three, and most serious psychopathology, is that of Ophelia. Her madness seems total, but critics have questioned why Ophelia would lose her reason. Katherine Mansfield wrote, "The Mad Scene, if one looks at it with a cold eye, is really very poor."⁴ However, if one believes, as the text suggests, that there probably was a sexual relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, than one can understand her losing her mind. Hamlet's gross and sexual remarks to her before the staging of the Mouse Trap and Ophelia's lack of rebuttal or recoil constitute evidence that they were on intimate terms. Ophelia herself makes reference to intimacy when she sings the Valentine Song in the Mad Scene. In spite of intimacy, Ophelia lost Hamlet, but until her father's death and Hamlet's banishment the possibility of reconciliation existed. Ophelia could have confessed to her father her intimacy with Hamlet, and her father then might have consented to their marriage. With this possibility lost, Ophelia's last ray of hope was also lost. Ophelia is described by others as a "sweet maid," but in her heart she harbors a secret she can only share with Hamlet. When Hamlet breaks the relationship and then kills her father, the pressure she feels because of her secret becomes unbearable. Ophelia is praised throughout the play as innocent, and the burden of her secret distresses her. Given her reputation, the situation becomes acute and she must confess. Sane, she cannot speak; insane she must become. Ophelia cleanses her soul through her confession in the Valentine Song:

By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't, if they come to't;
By cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.
So would I ha'done, by younder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.

(4.5.59-66)⁵

In Ophelia's second mad scene, she distributes flowers. Rue she gives to the Queen and refers to "we":

⁴Quoted in Salvadore de Madariaga, *On Hamlet* (London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1964), p. 68.

⁵William Shakespeare, "Hamlet," in *Shakespeare*, Ed. Hardin Craig (New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1931). All further references are to this edition.

There's rue for you; and here's some for me;
 We may call it herb-grace o'Sundays;
 O, you must wear your rue with a difference

(4.5.181-183)

Does the reference to "we" indicate that Ophelia believes that both she and the Queen share something in common; that they have both committed similar indiscretions? Is Ophelia by this veiled association with the Queen clutching for a last straw of normality?

If the Valentine Song is used by Ophelia to cleanse her soul, then perhaps her drowning is used to cleanse her body. It is not clear in the text if Ophelia meant to take her own life, but the phrase "as one incapable of her own distress" may mean that she was unaware of her distress, unaware of her mental problem, and unaware of the danger of the water to her life. It is clear though, that she was weaving garlands in the brook and she died there. The Valentine Song did not successfully cleanse her soul, nor does the brook cleanse her body. Ophelia's misery and hopelessness have no outlet. She is inwardly consumed.

If Ophelia's madness is totally debilitating, what is the matter with Hamlet? Is his madness real or feigned? We know that Hamlet's situation is one of great social pressure. Ophelia describes him well:

O what a noble mind is here o'er thrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
 tongue, sword;
 The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
 The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!

(3.1.158-162)

Not only the court watches Hamlet; his father's ghost makes demands and presumably watches as well. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, must satisfy all observers, be the glass of fashion, fulfill all expectations. On top of this, Hamlet is egocentric, distrustful, and abnormally consumed with his mother's remarriage. Is it any wonder that he is troubled?

The Ghost appears and orders Hamlet, "Revenge this foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25), but Hamlet, the observed of all observers, procrastinates in his quandary. He feels compelled to obey his father and eradicate what is rotten in the Kingdom of Denmark, but he cannot bring himself to kill Claudius. Hamlet misunderstands what he is told by his father's ghost. The two things he is forbidden to do, he does, "Taint not thy mind nor let they soul contrive against thy mother" (1.5.85-86), and what he is commanded to do, he tries to avoid. His

conflict becomes the setting for his "madness." Because of his social circumstances, Hamlet is constantly at odds with people he cannot avoid. The conflict within him becomes acute, and he fails to perceive reality clearly. Hamlet is not mad; as is often thought, rather, "I am but mad North Northwest: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw" (2.2.396-97). Hamlet's self-diagnosis is essentially that he is a bit off-course under certain circumstances. Unlike Ophelia in her self-contained grief, Hamlet is drawn out by his conflict, drawn into relations with many others.

Freud sees Hamlet as hysterical and describes his problem as sexual.⁶ The text, however, does not support this simple reduction of Hamlet's behavior. He is caught between loyalty to his father and the pressures of the world around him. Hamlet becomes obsessed with his conflict and is muddled in carrying out the revenge of his father's murder. A diagnosis of Hamlet that is more consistent with the text than Freud's is that Hamlet is suffering from melancholia, and that causes his inability to act. Melancholia typically produces a block in the mind which could account for Hamlet's inactivity and misanthropy. Melancholia is associated with cycles of widely fluctuating moods, rendering the melancholic capable of extravagant fury and, later, regret over the act. Such is the case with Hamlet during and after the killing of Polonius. This pattern also accounts for his behavior at Ophelia's grave and his regrets about it later. However, Hamlet is not fully manic-depressive. There is never a point at which he is so low in his cycle of moods that he is incapable of action. Throughout the play he is mentally and physically active. Hamlet's melancholia is brought about by grief, but it is grief mixed with anger and conflict. Hamlet's perception of reality becomes ajar, but he is not deranged. While in his own mind he is constantly referring to the request of the Ghost and the evil in characters around him, others don't know what Hamlet is talking about. Hamlet is bound up in his predicament, and his condition is exacerbated because he cannot share it.

According to P. Gottschalk, Elizabethan psychology saw the malady of procrastination, or lack of motivation to act, as a result of a lack of passion or lack of emotional fuel. Gottschalk argues that the Ghost should have aroused in Hamlet a passion for revenge, and that this passion, coupled with objective reasons for killing Claudius, would have led Hamlet to kill Claudius.⁷ Hamlet's procrastination, then, must stem

⁶William G. Holzberger and Peter B. Waldeck, *Perspectives on Hamlet* (Lewisburg, Pa. : Bucknell University Press, 1975), p. 104.

⁷Paul Gottschalk, *The Meaning of Hamlet* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1972), p. 37.

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from some disharmony of reason and passion. Hamlet's veiled talk of killing Claudius indicates that he knows what the Ghost expected. He may have some rational objection as well as a loss of passion, as he admits to the Ghost (3.4.107). Hamlet again does not appear to be deranged.

If Hamlet is not deranged, can he be diagnosed as mentally healthy? In *The Heart of Hamlet*, Bernard Grebanier describes Hamlet as the Renaissance man. "He has a high intellect and his mind works quickly, hurrying from one idea to another."⁸ It is Grebanier's conclusion that Hamlet's intellect is beyond the comprehension of the court and that the others, unable to follow his thoughts, interpret his brilliance as madness. It is evident to any reader that Hamlet is a highly philosophical man. However, Grebanier's assertion that the other characters assume Hamlet is mad merely because they cannot understand his intellect is much too simple an explanation. Hamlet doesn't draw accusations of madness because his intellect is above the understanding of the rest. He is seen as mad because in his turmoil he voices his inner conflict without giving his listeners information that would make his speeches comprehensible. Those who know him ask what is the matter, and Hamlet is compelled to respond with answers that don't make sense. Hamlet is dwelling on one thing and the questioners are thinking something totally different. The conflict and turmoil of Hamlet's mind are imbedded in his soliloquies.

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seems to me all the uses of this world.

(1.2.127)

Perhaps Grebanier believes that madness only exists if the person's speech becomes totally senseless, like Ophelia's. Grebanier doesn't seem to recognize degrees of insanity.

It is evident that there is something wrong with Hamlet. The first reference to Hamlet's madness is Horatio describing his words as "wild and whirling" (1.5.133). Wild and whirling refers to some level of imbalance, and Horatio uses this description even before Hamlet tells him of the murder and the Ghost (1.6). In Hamlet's soliloquies, he pours out the bitterness and frustration he feels over the corruptibility of those he has loved. He becomes so self-centered in his bitterness that he develops paranoid tendencies. He unfairly distrusts Rosenkrantz and

⁸Bernard Grebanier, *The Heart of Hamlet* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1960), p. 254.

Guildestern and delivers them an undeserved end, and then feels nothing but triumph over their death. His treatment of Ophelia is a paranoid eruption of his volcanic personality. He expresses indignation to Laertes at Ophelia's grave, "Hear you, sir, / What is the reason that you use me thus? / I loved you ever" (5.1.311). Hamlet seems unconcerned that he is responsible for killing Laertes's father and that Laertes may have reason to hate Hamlet even as Hamlet hates Claudius. Instead, Hamlet questions why Laertes should verbally show contempt for him. Hamlet is so caught up in himself and the conflict in his life that he does not recognize his own abnormal behavior.

Early in the play Hamlet's behavior arouses suspicion. (At Court, Hamlet is the "observed of all observers," and he is watched with a critical eye while he is preoccupied with a plan that must be concealed). Some critics argue that because Hamlet is so critically watched, he feigns madness, or puts on "an antic disposition" (1.5.172), to hide his real aim—to kill Claudius.⁹ This circumstance could plausibly lead one to feign madness. Further, Hamlet appears to be feigning madness when he tells his mother that he is only "mad in craft" (3.4.187). However, after this admission, when he is alone with her, he continues denouncing the dead Polonius and declares that he will "lug the guts into the neighbour room" (3.4.212). This is bizarre, and since he told his mother he was feigning madness he would have no motive to continue feigning. Hamlet is clearly not simply feigning madness.

The third level of "madness" in *Hamlet*, inconsequential in comparison to the first and most severe level, that of Ophelia, and less severe than the second level, Hamlet's, is evident in the opinions of Hamlet's madness held by the other major characters. These opinions are, in Freudian terminology, projections. A projection is a misperception of reality, an attribution of one's own internal state to something or someone else. The major characters all misperceive the reality of Hamlet's condition, each using his or her own psychological predilection to interpret Hamlet's irregularities. Claudius believes that Hamlet's madness is due to excessive grief over his father's death. Is Claudius feeling guilty over the murder? Gertrude believes that Hamlet's madness is a result of her own hasty remarriage. Is Gertrude's conscience speaking to her about her infidelity? Polonius believes that the madness is caused by Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet's suit. Does Polonius feel that he is to blame because he told Ophelia to reject Hamlet? Each misperceives the root of Hamlet's madness, projecting his or her own

⁹K.R. Eissler, *Discourse of Hamlet and HAMLET: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1971), pp. 341-342.

guilt. Shakespeare's insight into this psychological process Freud later termed the ego defense mechanism projection, in as much as Shakespeare's treatment of more serious psychological disorders is proof of his perspicacity.

Had *Hamlet* been written in the twentieth century, and had Hamlet's murder of Polonius come to trial in The United States, Hamlet could plead temporary insanity. Degrees of madness range from total loss of reality, like Ophelia's, to stress-caused disregard of, or failure of perception of, some elements of reality, characteristic of Hamlet, to ego defense mechanisms that just bend the perception of reality. The twentieth-century verdict on Hamlet would depend on the laws of the country in which the trial took place, and on the skill of his attorney in delineating his degree of madness.

Hamlet to the casual reader might appear to be a revenge play, but if this were so, then Hamlet would have finally killed Claudius and have made some reference to at last avenging his father's death. More, *Hamlet* primarily explores extreme grief, melancholia, and the human mind under conditions of guilt, stress, and hopelessness. Mildly and extremely irrational behavior is displayed and with clear etiological hypotheses. T. Lidz tells us that at the time Shakespeare was writing *Hamlet* he was specifically concerned with the subject of melancholia¹⁰. Melancholia does not begin to describe the depths of Ophelia's condition. Yet, melancholia has more severe effects than the guilt that caused the various faulty perceptions of Hamlet's "madness." Melancholia is realistically associated by Shakespeare with the pathological, yet not debilitating, middle range of mental illness manifested by Hamlet. Hamlet is neurotic and paranoid, yet he still maintains his reason, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (2.2.206). Madness is not always chaos. Hamlet defends his condition:

What I have done,
That might your nature, honour, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet;
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And, when he's not himself, does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness, if't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

(5.2.241-250)

¹⁰Lidz, p. 33.

The "Recorder" Episode of *Hamlet*

WILLIAM T. BETKEN

This is a new suggested reading of the "recorder" episode of *Hamlet*.

The text is in italics and, for convenience of reference, is essentially that of the 1982 Arden edition. The conjectured meaning immediately follows each italicized quotation.

The episode begins with the aftermath of the disruptive play within the play. Hamlet, alone with Horatio onstage, breaks off his conversation with the latter when he apparently hears the sound of approaching recorders within, although more likely Rosencrantz and Guildenstern approach upstage perceived as still out of hearing distance, and Hamlet, seeing them, refers to their false notes of speaking and role as spies when he says "Come, some music, come the recorders" (thus making Q₂'s placement of their entrance correct after all). In any event the non-musical sense of *recorder* seems an intended irony by the playwright considering its juxtaposition with the entrance.

GUILD. *Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.* Notably there is no felicitous greeting on either side; also he may be hoping that Horatio will leave to afford him privacy with Hamlet.

HAM, *Sir, a whole history.*

GUILD. *The King, sir*—The interruption is usually laid to Hamlet's next line, but he may have deliberately paused with a hinting stare at Horatio.

HAM. *Ay, sir, what of him?*

GUILD. *Is in his retirement marvellous distempered.*

HAM. *With drink, sir?* The flippancy of this play on the "drink" sense of *distempered* is not lost on Guildenstern since obviously the king was soberly watching the play within the play but a few moments ago.

GUILD. *No, my lord, with choler.* Of course when the king is in *choler*, marvelously so, the whole castle is in dread, including at the moment Guildenstern, and he fully expects Hamlet—barring total madness—to show concern upon hearing this news.

HAM. *Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to the doctor, for for me to put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into more choler.* The very excessiveness of the words forming the opening clause is mocking, full of disdain, and clearly in contrast to the remaining clause—perhaps addressed to Horatio—where Hamlet is almost painfully plain. It has of course always been recognized that Hamlet is playing on the two senses of purgation then—(1) physical, of the bowels, and (2) moral, of exculpation either by exoneration, usually, or

confession of wrongdoing. But Guildenstern—and Rosencrantz—are unaware of any "guilt" attached to the king, so they cannot interpret any other meaning here than the physical sense, and for the Prince to so speak of the King must to them only reflect madness. But even worse, a madness with terrifyingly dangerous implication, for Hamlet is obviously not suggesting that his purgative is the standard one then of doctors—viz, a laxative—but something else, something that, unlike a predictable laxative, would *perhaps plunge him into more choler*. This is, by the process of elimination, perfectly clear to all present, including the audience. All have now been clued in by the playwright for the bawdy, the same "serious", scorning type of bawdy that Hamlet used with Ophelia earlier in the scene.

GUILD. *Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.* There is an unseemly directorial, almost commanding quality in this speech of a courtier—albeit one-time friend—to his prince; it is understandable only in the extraordinary pressure on Guildenstern of his mission; he mentioned the king only to bring about regrettable results, and must now mention the queen, his real reason for being there. Also, curiously, his speech seems reversed in that one would expect Hamlet's *start* to precede the need for putting his *discourse into some frame*; this is probably due however to the *start* occurring at the end of the phrase *into some frame*; it would be poor dramaturgy to refer here to a start which occurred as far back as Guildenstern's previous speech, and certainly Hamlet would not *start* at anything in his own speech. But most curiously of all this playwright, who never wastes words, saw fit to verbalize a *start*, a "wild" one at that, which should be an actor's movement that is obvious to the entire audience.

The conjecture is that Guildenstern has advanced to, has perhaps even touched, Hamlet in the interest of greater confidentiality when he delivers, as he absolutely must, the queen's message; then Hamlet, partly out of disgust for his alleged friend's duplicity and partly in an overt move to humiliate Guildenstern, "starts wildly" away from him. Of course to "start" then commonly meant to simply leave or withdraw, much as we still say "start on a journey," but the "wildly" had to mean a sharp, jerking action; and to verbalize the same, when unnecessary to do since the action is obvious to all the audience, can only reflect the playwright's intention to make sure that the point is not missed; it is even possible that *put your discourse into some frame* has a secondary bawdy meaning; that is, *discourse* could be in its Elizabethan bawdy sense of sexual emission (as at *Love's Labor's Lost*, 5.1.12 (and cf. 3.1

of Nabbes' *Microcosmus*, published 1637)¹ and *frame* as at *All's Well* 3.1.13 (and cf. Partridge² at *frame love*, although while he gets the general idea correct he misses—as does Schmidt³—the specific meaning of a structure that encloses).

[(*start not so wildly from my*) *affair*—It is unlikely that *affair* is used in its bawdy sense (as *affairs* in the Sonnets—cf. Partridge), although it is possible and would only require an appropriate gesture on the actor Hamlet's part.]

HAM. *I am tame, sir, pronounce.* An obvious play on *wildly*.

GUILD. *The Queen your mother, in most great affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you.*

HAM. *You are welcome.* There is something humiliatingly bawdy here, either by gesture, by a bawdy play on *welcome*, or both; something here provokes Guildenstern to characterize Hamlet as “unwholesome” in the next lines; *welcome* also means “well come”, frequent in Shakespeare (and cf. my glossary in The Other Shakespeare series' edition of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*,⁴ also Partridge at *come*); it is difficult to otherwise explain Guildenstern's upset, unless Hamlet delivered his “welcome” with a lecherous looking up and down Guildenstern's body as his pretended interpretation of why the queen sent him.

GUILD. *Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother's commandment; if not, your pardon and my return shall be the end of my business.* Guildenstern may have been prepared for some of Hamlet's “strange behavior” but clearly not for this.

HAM. *Sir, I cannot.*

ROS. *What, my lord?* With this question the dramatist has pushed Rosencrantz to the fore for his share of the humiliation Hamlet is about to bestow upon both court spies.

HAM. *Make you a wholesome answer. My wit's diseased. But sir, such answer as I can make, you shall command—or rather, as you say, my mother. Therefore no more, but to the matter. My mother you say—*

Here Hamlet unleashes a whole torrent of bawdy beginning with *wholesome* = “hole-some” (cf. Partridge at *whole*) and *answer* = sexual res-

¹Thomas Nabbes, *Microcosmus*; Old English Plays (New Series; 1882-9; reissued 1964), ed. Bullen, vol. II.

²Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (1947; rev. ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968).

³Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare-Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1886), 2 vols. 3d ed. 1971.

⁴*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ed. William T. Betken, The Other Shakespeare Series (New York: Bardavon Books, 1982).

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ponse (for usages elsewhere in Shakespeare cf. *Two Gentlemen* op. cit.); *wit*=male (or female) organ and is rife in Elizabethan (and Shakespeare's) plays (cf. *Two Gentlemen* op. cit.).

When he reaches *mother* he pronounces it "mouther" in the same way he earlier in this scene pronounced *country* as "cuntery" [there seems to be no evidence that the *count*—of *country* was homonymic then as it is today (cf. Kokeritz),⁵ but rather pronounced as the word "count"]; *matter*, although it need not be specifically bawdy in this context, so happens to be and=flesh of genitalia (cf. *Two Gentlemen* op. cit.).

ROS. *Then thus she says: Your behavior hath struck her into amazement and admiration.* The line undoubtedly expresses the cowed Rosencrantz's sentiment as much as that of the queen; notice how he avoids using the word "mother."

HAM. *O wonderful son, that can so stonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother's admiration? Impart.*

More bawdy with *son*=male organ (cf. *Two Gentlemen* op. cit., also Partridge at *sunburst*); *heels*=rear end, buttocks (frequent in Shakespeare and for other usages cf. my glossary for *The Other Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*);⁶ use of *heel* or *heels* seems indifferent where this bawdy term is used elsewhere in Shakespeare, but the plural here may refer to both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, perhaps with a knowing glance toward Horatio; *Impart* may be a play on the verb "part."

ROS. *She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.* Again Rosencrantz avoids the use of "mother", but he unwittingly uses two words which have secondary bawdy meanings and which fortify the implication of Hamlet's *is there no sequel*. *Speak*=have orgasm (cf. *Romeo and Juliet* op. cit. for references in Shakespeare for both the trans. and intrans. of "speak" as bawdy); *closet*=colon (or vulva), this being only usage in Shakespeare except where Dr. Caius unwittingly uses it at 1.4.74 of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, but common enough in other plays of the day, e.g. in 3.1 of Nabbes' *Covent Garden*, performed 1632;⁷ placing a comma after Rosencrantz's *to speak* makes the bawdy sense clear.

HAM. *We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade with us?*

It is noteworthy that Hamlet throughout has never said "the Queen,"

⁵Helge Kokeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

⁶*Romeo and Juliet*, ed. William T. Betken, *The Other Shakespeare Series* (New York: Bardavon Books, 1984).

⁷Thomas Nabbes, *Covent Garden*; *Old English Plays* (New Series; 1882-9; reissued 1964), ed. Bullen, Vol. I.

instead using my "mother" and here, underscoring Rosencrantz's never having said "mother", he throws the latter's "she" back at him; he then refers to his original threat of making Rosencrantz his "mother" and so suggestively threatens to have it both ways; while it is conventional wisdom that for some reason Hamlet uses the royal "we" here (for the only such usage in the play) it is more likely that the *we* and *us* refer to himself and Horatio; it should be remembered that for all the thought in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's mind that Hamlet may be mad, it remains that Hamlet is their prince; *trade* also has the sense of prostitute trade (cf. Partridge), for male brothels were common enough in the London of that day.

ROS. *My lord, you once did love me.* He is understandably devastated.

HAM. *And do still, by these pickers and stealers.* By the use of "these" rather than "my" *pickers* the dramatist apparently intends a gesturing of the hands; does the gesture continue the bawdy allusions, or does it charade a playing of a recorder in presage of what follows?

ROS. *Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend.* Rosencrantz is apparently distressed by Hamlet's line or, more likely, his gesture, for *distemper* here is obviously in its "anger" sense.

HAM. *Sir, I lack advancement.* Hamlet has taken Rosencrantz's "liberty" in the same "licentious" sense as Polonius earlier expressed it (2.1.24) and 32) and retorts with a double entendre; "*advancement*" is taken by Rosencrantz as a *non sequitur* unless he so takes it to avoid acknowledgement of its bawdy meaning, which is "erection" (cf. *Love's Labor's Lost* 4.3.364, and Partridge at *standards*).

Hamlet is, with a vicious anger, giving Rosencrantz a mockingly bawdy reason for "denying his griefs"; but beyond that he is implying that he has no intention of "not denying his griefs" to such a "friend" as Rosencrantz.

ROS. *How can that be, when you have the voice of the King himself for your succession in Denmark?*

HAM. *Ay, sir, but while the grass grows—the proverb is something musty.* With this line the playwright ends the bawdy, or at least bawdy terms, and segues into new stage business of the *Players* (Actors') entrance.

HAM. *O, the recorders. Let me see one. —To withdraw with you, why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?* Hamlet now turns to Guildenstern to mete a due measure of wrathful ignominy upon him. The hunting expression referring to letting

the animal smell the hunter so it runs in the opposite direction into a net or *toil* is especially apt here where *wind* is Hamlet's word for "flatulence"; indeed he has probably turned to and upon Guildenstern precisely because the latter, letting Rosencrantz take all the scurrility, has moved behind Hamlet to be out of sight and, in consequence, out of mind.

GUILD. *O my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.* At least the cowering Guildenstern, unlike Rosencrantz, minces no words in fully acknowledging Hamlet's bawdy threat.

HAM. *I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe.* With a possible stress by Hamlet of "*this*" (cf. Partridge at *pipe*) the bawdy is ended, Hamlet debases Guildenstern—and by association Rosencrantz—sans innuendo, ceasing only with the interruption of Polonius.

Gabriel Harvey: "Excellent Matter of Emulation"

J. J. M. TOBIN

Gabriel Harvey, though clearly one of the wiser sort in his admiration for *Hamlet*,¹ was the luckless victim of Thomas Nashe's lampooning power in their celebrated pamphlet war. Shakespeare was a close student of their conflict and incorporated a considerable amount of material from Nashe's side of the conflict into the texture of a great many of his plays, most especially *Hamlet*.² However, Shakespeare was not so one-sided in his coopting enthusiasm for things Nashean as to ignore Harvey's writings for there are clear signs of borrowings from Harvey in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*,³ and, ironically enough, given Harvey's comment about the play in the margin of his copy of Speght's Chaucer, *Hamlet* itself.⁴

In my note on Harvey and *Hamlet* I argued that Shakespeare borrowed some of the diction of his most famous soliloquy, the "To be or not to be . . ." speech at 3.1.55ff,⁵ from Harvey's *A New Letter of Notable Contents* (1593), and I wish now to point out additional Harveian material in both *A New Letter* and the simultaneously published Pierce's *Supererogation*.

It is important to remember that the Nashe-Harvey quarrel almost ended with the edition of *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem* in 1593 with its apology to Harvey whom Nashe admits to having "rashly assailed" (12) in some "spleanative vaines of wantonnesse" (13). But for whatever reasons of arrogance or sense of still injured merit, Harvey rejected the overture to peace in *A New Letter of Notable Contents*, and Nashe as a consequence wrote a new Epistle to the Reader for the edition of 1594, resuming his spirited attack against the Harveys. Although there is no certainty in the matter, it is most likely that Harvey published along

¹J.J.M. Tobin, "Harvey and *Hamlet*," *AN&Q* (February 1980), 86-87

²See, for example, my "Nashe and *Hamlet*, Yet Again," *Hamlet Studies*, 2 (1980), 37-46; *Hamlet* and *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem*," *AJES*, 6 (1981), 158-167; and "Hamlet and Nashe's *Lenten Stufe*," *Archiv*, 219 (1982), 388-395.

³For Harvey in *Much Ado* see my *Shakespeare's Favorite Novel; A Study of 'The Golden Asse' as Prime Source* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), pp. 62-63. For Harvey in *Twelfth Night*, see my "Gabriel Harvey in Illyria," *English Studies*, 61 (1980), 318-328.

⁴"The younger sort take much delight in Shakespeares Venus & Adonis, but his Lucrece, & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort."

⁵Line references are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G.B. Evans et al (Boston, 1974).

with *A New Letter of Contents*, his *Pierce's Supererogation* or a *New Prayse of the Old Asse*. In both of these works Harvey reveals considerable anxiety and only fitful enthusiasm for revenging himself upon Nashe. Accordingly, when Shakespeare studied *Christ's Tears* with its apology made and then withdrawn, he studied also Harvey's response to the issue of acting or suffering, revenge or forgiveness. The result of his close reading of all three interconnected texts is that all three appear in interwoven strands in the course of the tragedy, especially in those expressions of doubt and uncertainty in the matter of revenge.

Harvey addresses his *New Letter* to his friend the printer John Wolfe and begins his work with a distinction between good news which should be sent quickly and messages of "condolement" (A2)⁶ which may be delayed. Harvey seems to have picked up the word from Nashe's dedication of *Christ's Tears*, the same dedication which has "beautified" (9), where Nashe writes of "my true cause of condolement" (10). Claudius refers to Hamlet's "obstinate condolement" (1.2.93), where "condolement" is unique in the canon. Two pages later, Harvey refers to "obstinate foes" (A3 recto), and later to a "retrograde Planet" (B2 verso), an adjective which may have contributed to Claudius' phrase, "retrograde to our desire" (1.2.114).⁷

Harvey then goes on to talk of truces between nations, apprehensive that not all truces are equally sincere, e.g., the possible truce between himself and Nashe. Christianity, in the case of the truce between France and Croatia, has "pregnant cause" to thank God (A2^v). Hamlet reflecting on his own inaction in his vengeance against Claudius, tells how he is "unpregnant of (his) cause" (2.2.568). In *Pierce's Supererogation*, Harvey berates himself for failing to defend "with pregnant arguments" the ass, a beast to which Nashe had likened Harvey, "but what an asse am I, that proceede so coldly, and dully in the Apology of so worthy a Creature" (167).⁸ Hamlet berates himself for his failure to implement his revenge by calling himself "dull" (2.2.567), and catching himself short, as does Harvey, with "Why what an ass am I" (2.2.582).⁹

As he develops his letter of 1593, Harvey writes of a man with

⁶Page references to *A New Letter of Notable Contents* as in the Scholar Press reproduction of 1970.

⁷"Retrograde" also occurs in Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, otherwise influential upon *Hamlet*. See my "On the Name Ophelia," *American Notes and Queries*, 16, 134-35.

⁸Page references to *Pierce's Supererogation* are to the Scholar Press facsimile of 1970.

⁹See also the analogous phrasing in Nashe's *Strange Newes*.

a "coat of interchaungeable colours" (B2^v) who wrote the "Pamphlet of *Strange Newes*" (B3^r), a work seemingly full of the "holiest devotion" (B3^r). Polonius and Claudius provide Ophelia with a (prayer) book, an exercise Polonius hopes "may color" (3.1.44) her loneliness and by "devotion's visage" (3.1.47) conceal their true purpose.

Harvey expresses uncertainty over Nashe's possible apology to him, and deliberates upon the consequent need to either accept the apology or revenge himself upon his opponent. There is no doubt that he fears duplicity on the part of his enemy and especially the duplicity that is cloaked in moral or religious guise. He marvels "... how Machiavel can teach a *Prince to be*, and, *not to be* religious? Another question, or ... " (B3^r). Mistrusting Nashe's seeming reformation and equally concerned with the justice of revenge, Harvey states, "I am no way rigorous in revenge ..." (D2^r). Nashe may indeed have changed for the better and "if unfaynedly he hath stripped-of the snakes skinne, and put-on the new man, as he *devoutly* pretendeth" (B3^v), Harvey will forgive.

The elements of diction in the midst of the theme of justifiable revenge are parallel to the situation and speech of Hamlet, a *Prince*, who states "*To be, or not to be, that is the question*" (and then goes on to argue the *religious* consequences of suicide) and speaks of an end to struggle, "a consummation/*Devoutly* to be wish'd" (3.1.62-63). The proximity of these terms to each other in each text is at least suggestive of borrowing, and when one notes that page B3^v concerns itself explicitly with the humanity of forgiveness in the face of great injury rather than revenge, the suggestion becomes still stronger.

Particularly interesting is Harvey's image of the shedding of the snakeskin which anticipates Hamlet's "when we have shuffled off this mortal coil" (3.1.66) for "shuffle" means fundamentally to move without lifting one's feet (cf. *OED*), while "coil" is glossed as "turmoil", although the *New Cambridge* edition adds "with a quibble upon 'coil' of rope."¹⁰ Reading the line in the light of Harvey's reference to the shedding of the snakeskin, one sees that Hamlet's "shuffle" is an image of serpentine removal of the external body.

Harvey has a mysterious gentlewoman, the inspiration of much of his writing. When he refers to her in *A New Letter*, he gives to Hamlet's gentlewoman, Ophelia, some of the diction for her anguished description

¹⁰Dover Wilson goes on to say, rightly, "the image in Shakespeare's mind was, I think, that of the soul standing erect and freeing itself from the lifeless body which has fallen to the ground like a divested garment," in *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969 repr.), p. xxxiv.

of his irrational behavior. The speeches of Harvey's gentlewoman are "beautified"¹¹ with the grace of Affabilitie" (C^r), "she never hated, but One" (C^r), her verses have no note "out-off tune" (C^v), praised by Harvey "not the first time" (C^v), and "her whole discourse is the combe of honey" (C^v). "Her proceeding [is] like the soverainest wine in the butt: her ending like the sweetest hooney in the bottome of the hooney-pot" (C2^r). She was always forgiving, except when "she sawe the fowle mouth so shamefully runne-over, without all respect of manners, or regard of honestie, or pretense of Truth, or colour of Reason" (C2^r). Hamlet has allowed his foul mouth to run over on the issue of Ophelia's honesty and the duplicity of others, of whom "all but one shall live" (3.1.148). Ophelia laments the change in Hamlet, having once "suck'd the honey of his music vows" (3.1.156) and now forced to "see that noble and most sovereign reason / Like sweet bells jangled out of time and harsh" (3.1.158). The Folio reading is "out of tune."

When Hamlet reflects on the difference between the Norwegian certitude and his own doubts in his seventh soliloquy, he incorporates some of the diction from Harvey's *New Letter*. It will be remembered that *A New Letter* is a response to *Christ's Tears*, and we have already noted that Hamlet's question, "what is a man if" construction is found in *Christ's Tears* (29). Harvey writes of "a sounde conscience [which] is a brasen wall against the mainest battry of sprite,¹² or Feude" (B4^r), of his gentlewoman who will write a rejoinder if a competent satisfaction is not made to Harvey, wasteful though it is for some one who should better write "to gaine a relenting soule" (B4^v), and of "a settled resolution to proceed according to Reason in generall, and Occasion in speciall" (B4^r). He feels that in regard to his struggle with Nashe he may "justly say: I have cause to use, as I am used" (B4^r) and that he should act, for "who in my case would give eare to the Law of Oblivion, that hath the Law of Talion in his handes" (B4^r). Later in the letter Harvey will declare: "I am in no way rigorous in revenge" (D2^r), and that his "reason" tells him "to pause awhile; and a scruple, or two of some deperdence, may seeme to say No" (D2^v), a repetition of his earlier view of the caution of the once-burned, "Security cannot be too precise, or scrupulous" (C4^r). Hamlet, clearly not very rigorous in revenge, asks the Norwegian captain whether the battle will be against "the main of Poland" (4.4.15), learns from him that the Norwegians "go to gain a

¹¹Perhaps deliberately echoing Nashe's adjective praising Elizabeth Carey in *Strange Newes*.

¹²See again the echoing words in *Strange Newes*.

little patch of ground" and then begins his soliloquy with "How all occasions" inform against him. He states that man has "godlike reason" which should not "fust in us unused," and that he hesitates in his task perhaps out of "bestial oblivion" or some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on th' event." Yet he goes on to say, "I have cause and will, and strength, and means / To do't" (4.4.18-46).

There are some other scattered elements in this short letter which have become part of the texture of *Hamlet*. For example, just before calling Nashe "a ridiculous Vice in a Tragedy" (D2^r), Harvey refers to mocking writers like Nashe who have wits "*Capon-crammed in Vanity*" (D1^v). This image Shakespeare gave to Hamlet when he tells Horatio that the Court is "coming to the play" (3.2.90) and tells Claudius in an ambiguous expression, seemingly indicative of frustrated ambition, "I eat the air, promise-cramm'd—you cannot feed capons so" (3.2.94-95). Harvey argues that "petty foiles incense choler & enrage fury" (A3^r), that "men may stand upon braving termes" (B2^r), and that he will attack Nashe with pen and ink, "why man, I will douse thee over head" (C2^r). These phrases from *A New Letter* have come together in Hamlet's narrative to Horatio of his discovering and changing of the letter Claudius had written to the King of England: "Why man, they did make love to this employment" (5.2.57), "the pass and fell incensed points" (5.2.61), echoed dichotomously in Hamlet's "these foils have all a length" (5.2.265) and Claudius's "Part them they are incens'd" (5.2.303), and the rhetorical question, "Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon" (5.2.63).

Finally, Hamlet's celebrated "what piece of work is a man" speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which has something of Montaigne in it, and more than a little of Nashe's *Lenten Stuffle*, has also some of the diction from Harvey's *A New Letter*. Harvey writes of the virtues of his gentlewoman, after referring to Nashe's "pestilent and virulent sheets of wast paper," the arguments of which will "Vanish like smoke in the Ayer" (B4^r). She is a "heavenly Creature" (B4^v), best assigned "a divine piece of service" (B4^v), rather than an indictment of Nashe, "a thing . . . contrary to the shining lovelinesse of her milde disposition, as the bitterest bitter seemeth repugnant to the sweetest sweet" (B4^v). She is among other things "a serpent in wit, a Dove in life: a Fury in execution an Angell in conversation" (B4^v). Indeed, like Nestor, her whole menage is brave, "and she is such a Paragon, as may compare with the excellentest of Homers women" (B4^v). Her conceits are "illuminate with the light of Reason" (B4^v-C). Her sentences are "perfumed with delight" (C). Nothing is more savory than "all her platformes & actions" (C), and yet "what patterne or skill, or Practise, more admirable then the

whole" (C). Her hatred, if she has any, is "like the flashing weapon of the fiery Aier" (C). Were Harvey to do her justice, he would have to be more skilled than the ideal orator described by Cicero. Then he "could display her excellent perfections, whose minde is as full of ritch giftes, and precious Jewells, as New-yeares-day. Yet her *goodliest* ornament and greatest wonder is the sweet humilitie of that *brave* courage" (C). Hamlet in describing the wonders of man borrows the rhythm and some of the diction from this description by Harvey of a special woman. Among the pieces of diction are "*disposition*" (II.ii.298), and like Harvey's gentlewoman his current task and attitude is against the true nature of that disposition which is "*goodly*," "*most excellent*," "*air*," "*brave*," "*appeareth*"-"*seemeth*," "*pestilent*," "*what*," "*piece*," "*reason*," "*form*," "*admirable*," "*an angel in*," "*paragon*," and "*women*" (2.2.298-309).

When Harvey cites the virtues of his gentlewoman, he argues that she is the equivalent of the bravest man who is "A Lion in field, a Lamme in the towne, A Joves Eagle in feude, an Apollos Swanne in society: A Serpent in wit, A Dove in life: A Fury in execution, *an Angell in conversation*" (B4^v). Seven lines later Harvey calls his gentlewoman "a *Paragon*" (B4^v). Here with all these beasts, one fury and one angel is the origin of Hamlet's new view that man is not only an angel, but the paragon of *animals*.

Such was Shakespeare's willingness to adopt the rhetorical structure of praise that he has transformed Harvey's extolling of a single woman into another hesitant revenger's qualified praise of man in general.

There is something especially satisfying in the fact that the Ramist Harvey, wondering how to save the honor of his brothers, his father, and himself, provided Hamlet with the perfectly Ramistic, dichotomously divided opening of his fourth soliloquy, "To be, or not to be . . .;" as well as one of the thematic threads woven into that soliloquy, that of action versus passivity, in particular, that virulent form of action, revenge.

I am well aware that one of the many perils facing the student of sources, especially Shakespearean sources, is the hubris arising from the belief that one has unearthed a new influential text, forgetting both that "*originality*," as Housman said of Hopkins' poetry, "is not nearly so good as goodness, even when it is good" (letter to Robert Bridges, 30 December, 1918) and that in the field of *Quellenforschung* issues are not so much a matter of either/or but both/and, for Kenneth Muir is right: Shakespeare's creative imagination was coalescent, his works poly-

genetic.¹³ Harvey is but a strand, albeit an important strand in the composition of *Hamlet*, a strand closely interwoven with Nashe and others.¹⁴

Noteworthy among these others is Duplessis-Mornay, the case for whose irenic influence upon *Hamlet* and especially the fourth soliloquy has been made most persuasively by Kenneth Rothwell.¹⁵ Harvey, temperamentally, if not philosophically, in an explicit manner an irenicist, knew Duplessis-Mornay in the Countess of Pembroke's version, *Discourse on Life and Death*. Muir has reminded us that "among the difficulties in determining Shakespeare's source material is the fact that a phrase in Shakespeare's consciousness which allowed the linking of two passages may itself be absent from his work."¹⁶ Diction from Harvey's *A New Letter* appears in the fourth soliloquy, as does that from the *Discourse on Life and Death*. In *A New Letter* Harvey writes of the Countess of Pembroke and mentions specifically her work on Duplessis-Mornay:

What Dia-margariton, or Dia-ambre, so comfortative, or cordiall, as Her Electuary of Gemmes, (for though the furious tragedy *Antoni-
nius*, be a bloody chaire of estate, yet the divine *Discourse of life,
and Death*, is a restorative Electuary of Gemmes) whom I do not
expressly name, not because I do not honour Her with my hart, but
because I would dishonour Her with my pen, whom I admire, and
cannot blason enough.

(A4^v-B)

Here is a link sufficient to have joined Harvey and Duplessis-Mornay, two irenicists, in the mind of a thinker equally dubious about the advantages of rash action.

The scholar bent upon source study may sometimes appear to act with divine confidence and believe indeed that his powers of apprehension border at the very least upon the angelic, when in fact his contributions are often of the most modest kind, seeing the origin of a theme, the resolution of a textual crux, or even providing the probably correct placing of a comma, all this hardly the work of an angel in apprehension, hardly like a God. Only a contribution for the benefit of the wiser sort.

¹³Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), esp. pp. 11-13.

¹⁴For the role of Apuleius in *Hamlet*, see *Shakespeare's Favorite Novel* (n. 3 above), pp. 74-86.

¹⁵Kenneth S. Rothwell, "Hamlet, Duplessis-Mornay; and the 'Irenic' Vision," *Hamlet Studies*, 3 (1981), 13-31.

¹⁶Muir (n. 13 above), p. 11.

CRITICAL FORUM

("No, no, they do but jest—poison in jest.
No offence i'th' world")

Hamlet's Flesh Revisited

Several points in Robert F. Willson's gentlemanly disagreement with me regarding the applicability of alchemic terms to the "sullied" / "solid" flesh controversy need to be aired. For example, he writes that my "claim rests on the assumption that the process of melting down creates a dew or 'purified water,' a substance we are urged to associate with Hamlet's 'golden ideals.'" He observes that "the logic breaks down here" but not before a parenthetical aside that "these ideals are nowhere identified or discussed."¹

Surely it is not necessary for readers of *Hamlet Studies* to be reminded of the Prince's strong idealism: "What a piece of work is a man! how Noble in Reason? how infinite in faculty? in forme and moving how expresse and admirable? in Action, how like an Angel? in apprehension, how like a God? the beauty of the world, the Parragon of Animals!"² Professor Willson's main point appears to be that "solid" fits the alchemic context as well as "sullied" insofar as a base metal to be broken down into gold is also concrete. True, but I nowhere say that the "solid" reading has to be ruled out; I simply advance the earlier reading as preferable. At a recent meeting of The Shakespeare Association of America, a speaker on the theater told of an actor who pronounced the two words in such a manner that they sounded alike and could therefore fuse Quarto and Folio readings in his rendering of the soliloquy. This effect may be more of a trick than a "resolution," but it at least preserves both texts in a conservative way.

Yet the alchemic metaphor apparently utilized by Shakespeare need not imply chicanery. It is a common, but misinformed belief that the principal purpose of the hermetic arts was to transform base metals into

¹"'Sullied' Or 'Solid': Hamlet's Flesh Once More," *Hamlet Studies*, 4 (1982), 92-93.

²2.2.300-04. All Shakespearean quotations in this paper are from *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. C. Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968), except for two Quarto references cited by other scholars. References to works other than *Hamlet* are to the Pelican ed., gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972).

gold; indeed, the literature on the subject belies this contention. For instance, Cumberland Clark, in his chapter on "The Art of the Alchemist" in *Shakespeare and Science*,³ starts off as follows: "in its narrow sense, the art of the alchemist consisted of an attempt to change base metals into gold"; he continues, "The real aim of alchemy should be to promote bodily health," and asserts that "the dishonest tricksters, who far outnumbered the honest enquirers, concentrated more on the conversion of all kinds of metal to gold than on the cure of disease."⁴ Since the Prince, in this soliloquy among others, is trying to extirpate something "rotten in the State of Denmarke," we may infer that he also is trying to be rid of a "disease" or moral infection. On the other hand, Gertrude does refer to "metals base" (4.1.26), so the more popular understanding of the pseudo-science could also be thought of as accommodated on one level of meaning, but only one.

Professor Willson questions whether "Dew" in this context can be cogently related to the alchemic ideal of purification. To be fair, I must admit that he may have a point, at first, for Clark has a chapter on "Dew" as well, and relates it apparently to a "somewhat sinister significance," citing the crux specifically and adding that "Dews of blood is an expression from the same play."⁵ On the other hand, most of his chapter deals with the salutary associations of these pearl-like drops of condensation, and he notes also that Laertes speaks of "the Morne and liquid dew of Youth" (1.3.41). Granted, the Prince may be thinking mainly of death at this juncture. But, at the same time, death can be thought of as a form of release, of spiritual purification. In any case, the reference to dew easily had an alchemic meaning in Othello's famous allusion, "Keepe up your bright Swords, for the dew will rust

³Cumberland Clark, *Shakespeare and Science: A Study of Shakespeare's Interest in, and Literary and Dramatic Use of, Natural Phenomena; With an Account of the Astronomy, Astrology, and Alchemy of His Day, and His Attitude Toward These Sciences* (Birmingham: Cornish Bros., 1929), pp. 60-69. See also "Patterns in Shakespeare's Alchemical Usages," in Fred R. MacFadden, Jr. "Report on Opportunities for Teaching and Researching the Literature of Shakespeare Using the Computer," in *Computer Studies in the Humanities and Verbal Behavior*, 4 (June, 1973), 3-8. On alchemic imagery specifically in *Hamlet*, see Linda L. Carney, "Alchemy in Selected Plays of Shakespeare," Unpub. doctoral diss. (Drake University, 1978). Because of *Hamlet's* kinship to *Julius Caesar*, see also William B. Toole, "The Metaphor of Alchemy in *Julius Caesar*," *Costerus*, 5 (1972), 35-51. The newsletter on alchemy and literature, *Claudia Pavonis*, under the auspices of The Modern Language Association of America, is worth investigating.

⁴Clark, pp. 60, 62-63 (italics added).

⁵Clark, p. 247.

them" (1.2.59), so why not with Hamlet? Thus, in reference to this Venetian passage, Peter Ure writes of the Moor: "His words before they come to the point of utterance have been passed through some creative, inner alembic which turns them all to precious metal. Because of this transmutation, and despite Othello's own declaration that he is rude in his speech, we are tempted to think of him as the possessor of a poetic faculty."⁶ Elsewhere⁷ I have indicated that the concept of melting, as revealed in Hamlet's speech, related to alchemic distilling in the scientific terminology of the time. I pointed out that Shakespeare associated the process of distilling with the production of natural moisture, e.g. in *Venus and Adonis*, lines 65-66 ("her cheeks . . . dew'd with such distilling showers") and Sonnet 5 ("summers distillation"). The 1611 Bible cited in the *OED* contains the line "My speech shall distill as the dew" (Deut. 32.2), and a work of Warde's referred titularly to "distillations, . . . fusions and meltynges" (1558). Moreover, in the same scene in which Hamlet's controversial soliloquy occurs, and not long afterwards, Horatio uses the key phrase "bestil'd / Almost to Jelly with the Act of feare" (1.2.204-05), and editors have emended *bestil'd* to what was plainly meant, *distilled*. So evidently the idea of purified water was on the dramatist's mind throughout this scene. When Laertes, in the next scene, refers specifically to sullyng in connection with Hamlet ("no soyle nor cautell doth besmerch / The vertue of his feare"—1.3.15-16), we have further evidence of the Prince's key word being *sullied*.

Citing a presumed parallel in *2H4*, Professor Willson believes that Hamlet's desire for dew represents "an escape into nothingness" only. This "parallel" did not escape my ken, as he assumed, but since I was obliged to cut my article drastically before it could be accepted, I did not have room for considering it. My conclusion from examining this and other proposed analogies was that Shakespeare continually used the idea of solidity in connection with land (compare the Latinism *terra firma*) but the concept of being sullied in conjunction with flesh. A good example of the latter is in *Much Ado About Nothing*: ". . . the wide sea / Hath drops too few to wash her cleane againe, / And salt too little, which may season give / To her foule tainted flesh" (4.1.138-41). A recent study has been cited as possibly the last word on the subject of "sullied flesh," noting that "Shakespeare's religious faith, his customary idioms, his imagery, the dramatic purpose of the specific soliloquizing, and the

⁶*Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1974), p. 8.

⁷See my correspondence in the *TLS*, 3 September 1982, p. 947.

overall theme of the play" point in the direction of "sullied."⁸ Although it is probably too sanguine to say that a final word has been vindicated, the bulk of evidence now in favor of the Quarto reading is impressive. I am inclined to believe myself that "solid" was the printer's instinctive normalization of what (rightly or wrongly) he took to be a phonetic spelling.⁹ But it may be a revision.

More evidence can be drawn upon. Clark, for example, enlists Horatio's reference to the Four Elements as proof of alchemic interest since the alchemists made much use of this belief (1.1.153-55). Professor Willson would rather "invoke the microcosmic metaphor," but that has been relegated to alchemy too: "Mediaeval science was founded almost entirely on analogy. Man, the microcosm, was compared to the great universe, the macrocosm, and, as his body was thought to be formed and secreted from blood in its interior, so the stones and metals were formed in the interior 'veins o' th' earth' (*Temp.* 1.2.255)."¹⁰ Further, it may not be without significance that Ruland's *Lexicon* included "Dew" as a Renaissance synonym for the *prima materia*, about which the alchemists were continually concerned. The Prince thereby desires the loss of recognizable physical form in longing for dew even as Faustus hopes for physical transformation at the end of the tragedy bearing his name.

It is true that not everything surrounding the crux can easily be relegated to it and that Professor Willson is within his rights in questioning the validity of my relating the pun on "Canon" to the soliloquy or in seeing a defect in my not relating "Thaw" to alchemical usage. Actually, if the crux makes alchemic sense, its meaning would be primarily metaphoric, not an instance of paronomasia, and the concept of thawing is closely enough akin to distilling, to my mind at least, to be no cause for concern. But we are not working here with neat parallels, and some (if not all) of the metaphor may have been unconscious.

⁸Lin Tung-chi, "Sullied' is the Word: A Note in Hamlet Criticism," *Waikuo-yu*, Fudan English Studies (Shanghai Institute of Foreign Languages), 1 (1980), 1-11. (The quotation is from the abstract in *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, 30 [1980], 36.) George Walton Williams, in his review of "Textual Studies," *Shakespeare Survey*, 34 (1981), 195, writes: "This is a significant contribution—perhaps the final one?—to the controversy." Tung-chi, however, does not consider past scholarship in detail, for example Akihiro Yamada's "*Hamlet*, I.ii.129-30, and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, v.iv.7-9," *Notes and Queries*, NS 21 (1974), 130.

⁹See Gavin Bone, "The Clue of Pronunciation," *TLS*, 21 March 1929, p. 241; W.S. Weeks, *ibid.*, 4 April 1929, p. 276.

¹⁰Clark, p. 69.

Hamlet's Flesh Revisited

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Although I have little hope that most Shakespeareans will feel now that the crux is finally "resolved," I trust that at least scholars will find that I myself have distilled the essence of alchemic meaning that is obtainable here and may thereby make use of it for themselves.¹¹

ROBERT F. FLEISSNER

¹¹After this note was submitted and accepted, G.V. Monitto's article, "Sallied Flesh' (Q1, Q2): *Hamlet* I.ii.129," in *Studies in Bibliography*, 36 (1983), 177-8, came to my attention. According to MacDonald P. Jackson's brief review in *Shakespeare Survey*, 37 (1984), 218, the essay is an important one, finding "in three French-English reference works of 1580, 1593, and 1611 evidence that around the time when *Hamlet* was written 'sallied' included senses now contained in 'sullied.' "

REVIEWS

A Review of Periodical Articles (1984-85)

It all depends upon what you mean by 'tragedy'. Regular readers may recall that last year's review observed how genre-centred arguments found themselves constricting their view of *Hamlet* (validly or not) to accord with the needs of the form (*HSt*, 6 [1984], 118-19). A different aspect of the same impulse is to fail to find *Hamlet* a tragedy at all. Thus Leon Golden¹ takes Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* as the type of the Aristotelian tragedy, with its *spoudaios* (noble) hero, worthy of respect, whose fall is triggered by an intellectual error and so creates a response of pity and fear from the audience. *Hamlet* fails to live up to these criteria: far from responding to the challenge of the death of his father with the *arete* (human virtue) of an Oedipus, Hector or Othello, who are all active heroes, he separates himself from "the potent imperative of action." When he does act, he does so "without establishing the conditions of an heroic confrontation" (in the killing of Polonius), or through the operation of chance deriving from a misfiring plot devised by another (in the final duel and killing of Claudius). The justice which thus operates in *Hamlet* is haphazard, a result of chance, not necessity; and *Hamlet* himself is a mere victim of accident, a "passive and pathetic figure rather than an active and tragic one." The audience feels a sense of the waste of human potential (Golden agrees with Bradley here), not of pity and fear: *Hamlet*'s story is a "portrayal of the pathos, not the tragedy, of the human condition." As with the classic instance of this kind of critical method, T.S. Eliot's dismissal of *Hamlet* because it didn't do what he wanted it to do, the danger is that the prescriptive will be allowed to diminish a text which fails to fit its rules. Look at Golden's points from another angle (and his material, though largely familiar, is valid enough), and it is possible to see *Hamlet* as enforcing an expansion of our notions of tragedy.

As some other articles imply, it is a quality of *Hamlet* that it presents a multiplicity of modes which have been accommodated to 'tragedy'. Application of the revenge motif is one of the most historically respectable of these, and a short piece by Eric Rasmussen² posits a neat struc-

¹Leon Golden, "Othello, *Hamlet*, and Aristotelian Tragedy," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35, no. 2 (Summer 1984), 142-56.

²Eric Rasmussen, "Fathers and Sons in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 463.

ture for Hamlet being at the fulcrum of a balance between action and inaction. Hamlet's delay in completing his revenge is, of course, reflected in the Fortinbras sub-plot, his revenge being diverted from Denmark to Poland; and also in a classical allusion to a son who did not revenge his father. (Marcus Junius Brutus was murdered after surrendering to Pompey in 77 BC, and his son proceeded to temporize rather than revenge). These two are countered in the play by a son who does revenge his father (Laertes) and by a classical allusion to revenge (Pyrrhus).

This is, surely, too neat: one might say, for example, that Fortinbras's inheritance of the kingdom of Denmark at the end of the play provides him with perfect revenge. But Rasmussen rightly reminds us that the potentially complex structures of revenge-drama need to be taken into account in our definitions of 'tragedy'. Through an examination of role-playing in Montaigne and Jacobean drama, Joan Lord Hall³ observes how the structures produce destructive consequences, as the role-playing revenger (e.g. Vindice) becomes trapped within his role. Shakespeare, however, is seen as exploiting more positive aspects of role-playing, so that the notion of acting out a part produces creative change. This is evidenced in Hamlet's advice to Gertrude ("Assume a virtue, if you have it not"), where he argues that repeated patterns of behaviour can result in constructive change. Hamlet himself, says Hall, embodies a further problem, that of how role-playing can become a vehicle for self-expression. Hamlet's realization that acting is ubiquitous and can be exploited for his own ends, and that "he is part of a mysterious script directed by Providence" can be compared with Montaigne's acceptance of the universal nature of role-playing ("All the world doth practise stage-playing," runs the Florio version of part of "How One Ought to Gouverne his Will") and his locating the solution to the problems so raised in the idea of playing "well and duely" ("Of Experince"). The main value of Hall's article lies in the interesting Montaigne parallels, but the resulting view of *Hamlet*, though familiar, demands attention.

It is supported, with a different slant, in an article by Michael O'Connell⁴ which briefly visits the well-known territory of Hamlet's obsession with 'seems' in the course of a discussion of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage as an extension of, or competition with, existing religious structures. *Hamlet's* central metaphor demands, O'Connell asserts, an

³Joan Lord Hall, "To play the man well and duely": Role-playing in Montaigne and Jacobean Drama," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 22, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 173-86.

⁴Michael O'Connell, "The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm, Antitheatricalism, and the Image of the Elizabethan Theater," *ELH*, 52, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 279-310.

ultimate acceptance of all the 'seems' of the play, costume, gesture, spectacle, as consistent with Hamlet's own acceptance of his role: Hamlet "achieves his revenge only when he can accept his own metaphor, can accept his role as a role and become, in both senses, an actor."

This familiar modern approach is sharpened in a characterically perceptive article by James L. Calderwood.⁵ Hamlet's 'readiness' is both internal and external, a matter of both language and dress. Both aspects move to a state, as it were, of proper proclamation, of finding the right apparel. On the external level, Hamlet moves through his inky cloak, his state of abandoned dress as reported by Ophelia and his reported nakedness on arrival in Denmark, to his sea-gown (5.2.13), which, Calderwood suggests, he may wear in the graveyard scene and which presents the image of an adventurous hero. At this point, he is externally ready for the play's climactic action. Correspondingly, Hamlet proceeds through a linguistic development whereby he doffs "the blank verse apparel of reason and sanity in favor of a prose style that is both arrayed in and disarrayed by puns, equivocations, metaphors, ironies, quibbles." He moves to a readiness for death by a stripping down of language to its bare realities ("If it be now" etc.), to statements as direct and functional as his dress now is. Calderwood brings his argument to its neat conclusion by seeing the two aspects as coinciding at the end of the play, as Hamlet removes his cloak to fence freely while showing a willingness "to be clothed by the situation, to fit himself to circumstance. Calderwood does have, quite flagrantly, to make some assumptions in the service of his pyrotechnic argument, but the result is not only a good display, but a real deepening of a tried approach.

The same can be said of Jerome Mazzaro's⁶ discussion of another of the strands of the complex *Hamlet* tapestry. His proposition is that both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* demonstrate "natural memory's relation to 'madness' or the inability of individuals to function in the world." Ophelia's memory is disrupted by madness, while Hamlet's feigned madness preserves memory intact. Ophelia's words, carrying but half sense, do not signify to others what she intends: her genuine madness is thus "a closing off of one's self from others and from one's past through a breakdown in the *verba-res* bond." Although Ophelia here cannot retrieve forms which will allow hearers to understand what she says, her later recollection of snatches of songs suggests Shakespeare's awareness

⁵James L. Calderwood, "Hamlet's Readiness," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1984), 267-73.

⁶Jerome Mazzaro, "Madness and Memory: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*," *Comparative Drama*, 19, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 97-116.

of the distinction between 'natural' and 'artificial' memory, the latter being an entirely human-made structure, as in Polonius's admonition to Laertes to "character . . . these few precepts in thy memory." The forms assigned to the 'artificial' memory can be durable even in insanity, and Shakespeare carefully charts an acceptable course for Ophelia's illness (involving natural humour and devastating shocks), a pattern consistent with such Elizabethan theories of madness as Timothy Bright's of 1586. Despite the proximity of Hamlet's melancholy to a kind of madness, Hamlet is firmly distinguished from Ophelia: where her language is centripetal, with random allusions moving towards meaning, his is centrifugal, with words wildly moving away, from meaning. Thus it is the failure of language to sustain them which undermines key relationships, and this in turn leads to isolation and a weakening of the social fabric, for it is through memory that both personal and national continuity are assured. Mazzaro's concern with memory and madness provides a very helpful connection between the private and public worlds of *Hamlet*, and the disruptions he observes must form a part of any 'tragic' view which hopes to measure up to the play itself.

Two articles on cultural assimilation of *Hamlet* rather than *Hamlet* itself, are worth noting. Saburo Sato⁷ informatively traces the particularly striking impact of the play on the intellectual history of the Meiji period (1868-1912), when Japan was dramatically opened out from feudalism to the modern world. He distinguishes three stages in the process: the play as a source of practical advice (the first appearance of a quotation from *Hamlet* was when Samuel Smiles's *Self Help*, which cited Polonius's "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," was an immediate best-seller on being translated in 1871—all kinds of morals spring to mind here!); the play as evoking interest in issues of personal identity (the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, not surprisingly, proved a major force here); and the play as demonstrating an ideal of fragile feminine beauty in the figure of Ophelia, appealing to one side of the Romantic movement. If the entry of a work of art into another culture tells one much about that culture, so its adoption by a different medium will often say a lot about the qualities of the medium. Mary Z. Maher⁸ adds to the growing literature on the subject of Shakespeare and film by analyzing the methods of presentation of Hamlet's soliloquies in the 1980 BBC television production, with Derek Jacobi as Hamlet. Using material

⁷Saburo Sato, "Hamlet, Polonius, and Ophelia in Meiji Japan," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 22, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 23-33.

⁸Mary Z. Maher, "Hamlet's BBC Soliloquies," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36 no. 4 (Winter 1985), 417-26.

from an interview with the director, Rodney Bennett, Maher defines how the camera dictated the view of Hamlet which he wished to show. The decision to have six of the seven soliloquies shot with the actor looking in-camera meant that Hamlet became the 'narrator', creating a direct relationship with the viewers for whom he thus became a trusted figure. So the method of shooting enforced on the viewers a singleness of vision, corresponding with such directorial decisions as that Hamlet is never mad. Which, as Maher points out, turns *Hamlet* into a very different (and, one might add, less interesting) experience than it is in the theatre.

An interesting article by Harriet C. Frazier⁹ on Shakespeare's varied use of dying declarations makes only brief reference to *Hamlet*, but even that is sufficient to remind us of how Shakespeare is ever conscious of multiple view-points. The finale of the play presents a complex set of dying declarations, from the simple truthfulness of Laertes, to the appropriate evasiveness of Claudius and a full awareness of past and future in Hamlet ("Wretched queen, adieu," "I do prophesy th'election lights / On Fortinbras"). Frazier's main concern, to counter the tendency of legal commentators to take the simple line, on the extracted authority of a speech in *King John*, that the dying always speak the truth, could well be adapted to counter other attempts to impose the oversimplification of singleness.

There has been a good crop of textual notes of late, some of which go beyond the customary limits of the genre. Of these, the most resonant for faithful readers of this review will be Mats Rydén's¹⁰ discussion of the significance of plant names, where, that is, Shakespeare selects a name for "a specific contextual purpose over and above its role as a label of identification." He includes the crowflower (4.7), the hebon (1.5), the herb of grace (4.5), and, at greatest length, dead men's fingers / long purples (4.7) from Gertrude's account of the death of Ophelia. Rydén rejects K.P. Wentersdorf's idea that the fingers allude to the spadix of the *Arum maculatum* or cuckoo-pint as a euphemism for phallus on the grounds that such suggestiveness would spoil the contrast implied in the alternative names and that dead men's fingers is too pale a name for the cuckoo-pint's colourful spadix. It is just a non-provocative name for the roots of orchids, contrasting with long purples, which evoke the beautiful flowers and phallic appearance of orchids (thus,

⁹Harriet C. Frazier, " 'Like a Liar Gone to Burning Hell': Shakespeare and Dying Declarations," *Comparative Drama*, 19, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 166-80.

¹⁰Mats Rydén, "The Contextual Significance of Shakespeare's Plant Names," *Studia Neophilologica*, 56, no. 2 (1984), 155-62.

suitably for Ophelia, combining innocence with sexuality), and with the unspoken "grosser name," which would have been quickly understood by the audience to refer to the testicle-like roots of orchids.

Another old favourite is the "dram of eale," and Shirley Carr Grubb¹¹ adds to the literature with an extensive and ingenious discussion. Claiming that the accepted emendations do not make full sense, she proposes to retain the Q2 text. "Eale" is interpreted as meaning 'oil' (OE and ME *ele*), linking it with "unanueled" as 'not having received the sacrament of Extreme Unction'. She accepts Hilda Hulme's argument (*Explorations in Shakespeare's Language*, 1962) that "doth" = 'renders' and "of a doubt" = 'containing a doubt, doubtful', and so proposes a reading which employs religious imagery: "A mere drop of the oil of Extreme Unction could render doubtful the worthiness of a soul for salvation, a stumbling-block created by itself." She supports this with evidence from the attitudes taken to Extreme Unction by Luther and Melanchthon, the two men most associated with Wittenberg. Further, she proposes that the metallic associations sensed by editors have foundation, the image being one which, like "I know a hawk from a handsaw," operates in a dual manner. In the metallic sense, the image picks up alchemical procedures, particularly cupellation which distinguishes base metal from noble. The religious and metallurgical figures are thus developed simultaneously in the speech, alchemy's spiritual as well as physical significance providing an appropriate link between the two. This is a lot of meaning to pack into a short space, but the language of *Hamlet* is often highly condensed, as we are reminded in a note by Michael Srigley¹² on Hamlet's "Rightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake." Commentators have taken this to be a statement of the 'not this, but that' type, whether the traditional interpretation that the contrast is between stirring without great argument upon every trifling occasion and stirring at once where honour is at stake, or Harold Jenkins's suggestion that we supply an implied second 'not' after the first. Srigley notes that the syntax allows the contrast to be between the two adverbs, 'rightly' and 'greatly': not stirring without great argument is right greatness, while 'great' greatness (= 'inflated with a desire for glory') is to act on trivial grounds out of a sense of personal honour. This attractive reading attacks Fortinbras's actions, which are

¹¹Shirley Carr Grubb, "The Scandalous Dram of Eale," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 188-203.

¹²Michael Srigley, "'Rightly to be great': A Note on *Hamlet* IV. iv.53-56," *Studia Neophilologica*, 56, no. 2 (1984), 163-8.

of the kind condemned for selfishness in Cicero's *De Officiis* and Seneca's *Epistolae Morales*.

Smaller notes come from Naseeb Shaheen,¹³ who rejects the view that Hamlet's "You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife" is a direct reference to the Table of Kindred and Affinity in the Prayer Book on the grounds that the incest theme is embodied in Shakespeare's sources, and that the Table was not actually added to the Prayer Book until 1681, although it was drawn up by Archbishop Parker in 1563 and given full status of law in 1603; and from E. Kerr Borthwick,¹⁴ who suggests that "so capital a calf" might be a particularly outrageous pun on Hamlet's part: Julius Caesar was notoriously bald (Suetonius writes of soldiers chanting "we bring in the bald adulterer"), so that, if "calf" could be playing on Latin 'calvus' (= bald), this capital calf had a calvum caput. Are there no depths to which Hamlet will not sink? One might think that this Cleopatra was not worth losing the world for, but, as Borthwick says, punning is part of Hamlet's (and Shakespeare's) make-up, as much as is his capacity for powerfully condensed language and images. All human life is here.

The emendation game has been around for a long time now, and two notes suggest that one of the earliest players, Theobald, was also one of the brightest. Jeffrey Rayner Myers¹⁵ supports the suggestion Theobald made in a letter to Warburton (26 March 1730), that 'amities' could be read as 'enmities' in "As peace should still her wheaten garland wear / And stand a comma 'tween their amities" from Hamlet's account to Horatio of his devising of a replacement commission for England. The error would be an easy one in MS, and "enmities" makes more sense as a plural than does "amities." Nor does "enmities" require a special meaning for "comma": peace is a pause, if a brief one, between a historical enmity which has ended and a potential future enmity. Similarly, Robert F. Fleissner¹⁶ picks up Theobald's emendation—later retracted—that the Ghost is "confined fast in fires." If Shakespeare is echoing More's *The Supplication of Souls* (see Vittorio Gabrieli, *N&Q* 1979), the concepts are present in the 1603 Quarto ("Confinde in flaming fire"). This would make it more likely that Shakespeare wrote "confined fast

¹³Naseeb Shaheen, "The Incest Theme in *Hamlet*," *Notes and Queries*, 32, no. 1 (March 1985), 51.

¹⁴E. Kerr Borthwick, "So Capital a Calf: The Pun in *Hamlet*, III.ii.105," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35, no. 2 (Summer 1984), 203-4.

¹⁵Jeffrey Rayner Myers, "A Neglected Emendation of *Hamlet* V.ii.42," *Notes and Queries*, 32, no. 4 (December 1985), 474-6.

¹⁶Robert F. Fleissner, "*Hamlet* and *The Supplication of Souls* Reconvened," *Notes and Queries*, 32, no. 1 (March 1985), 49-51.

in fires," than "confined to fast in fires." Did, wonders Fleissner, Theobald actually inadvertently follow Shakespeare's procedure, that is, altering the phrase on second thoughts in order to avoid the apparent contradiction with the Ghost's return to the world? This is an intriguing idea; and who knows?

And speaking of the unknowable, perhaps the present reviewer should refer briefly to the question of postulated sources, on which J.J.M. Tobin took him up in the last *Hamlet Studies* (vol. 6, 111-2). The reviewer's over-jaundiced comments on Tobin's suggestions for Shakespearean borrowings from Nashe emerged from his own tendency to be sceptical about locating Shakespeare's language, especially individual words as opposed to phrases or sentences, specifically in the writings of others rather than in the general discourse of humanity. If the impression given was that such an attitude implies that Shakespeare never read a word, then, of course, correction is required. That this is a tricky area is shown in another brief note by Robert F. Fleissner¹⁷ on the oath ("by Seinte Loy") of Chaucer's Prioress. Fleissner illustrates his interesting idea that the oath might combine the reverent with the irreverent by adverting to Hamlet's oath "by Saint *Patricke*" (F, 1. 829), which might, he suggests, include among its references the Simon Patricke who translated the *Contre-Machiavel*, appropriate enough in the context of considering the expediency of taking the law into one's own hands. Nashe or Machiavelli? As Tobin rightly concludes, all readers should look at the evidence themselves: this is true of all articles mentioned in this review (to alert readers to them is its primary function), especially, perhaps we should add, when the reviewer ventures a note of disagreement.

W. HUTCHINGS

¹⁷Robert F. Fleissner, "That Oath of the Prioress," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 86, no. 2 (1985), 197-8.

To Be and Not To Be: Negation and Metadrama in 'Hamlet'. By James L. Calderwood. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. Pp. xvi+222.

My New Arden *Hamlet* is too fat for its dust-jacket. The metaphor is all too obvious, but we cannot be reminded often enough how *Hamlet* escapes our attempted neat enclosures. T.S. Eliot's famous essay, which declared the play a failure because it generated rumination, action, and emotion in excess of what was required in an "objective correlative" for a son's feelings toward his guilty mother, is a particularly glaring instance of a common reductionism. Impelled to get this untidy, self-undermining drama under control, we move from its rich variousness to some kind of coherent structure which, however finely nuanced, inevitably represents a narrowing-down. James L. Calderwood's invigorating new study enacts in its mode of operation a kind of reversal of this defining urge, following an initial highly patterned structural reading with a longer exposition of Shakespeare's negative mode in the play, which complicates and deconstructs what has come before. That negative mode, as he explores it, multiplies meanings, collapses polarities into one another, so that the play

seems dedicated to its own deconstruction by virtue of its employment of negation and erasure, in its stress on silence and secrecy, in its self-conscious creation of divisions and junctures, and in its metadramatic denial of its own illusions (p. xv).

Yet Calderwood is not arguing, as Eliot does, that *Hamlet* escapes Shakespeare's control; in his conclusion he sees the play moving toward significance rather than away from it, "from deconstruction to reconstruction" (p. xv).

At the heart of the structural reading is a metadramatic equation: Hamlet the character is to Old Hamlet, the father (with the same name) from whom he must separate himself, as *Hamlet* the play is to its genetic and generic source (also with the same name), the *Ur-Hamlet*, and the revenge-tragedy tradition from which Shakespeare must distance himself to create his own individual play. Both hero and play begin with an imposed generic identity—Shakespeare taking over the old revenge story, Hamlet required to take on his father's cause and hence his identity—and both struggle toward individuation by delaying and resisting defining action; only when the digressive, self-reflexive middle movement has amply worked out that exploration of self can hero act and play end. Hamlet's self-questionings and self-accusations ("Why yet I live to say, 'This thing's to do' ") highlight the play's resistance to the

"structural syntax" of its genre, calling attention to what revenge tragedies generally seek to obscure: the hiatus between vengeance vowed and vengeance enacted. A satisfactory conclusion for Hamlet and his play must speak not only to the initial revenge-imperative but to the succeeding scrutinized delay and naming of self by disjunction from others; must align self and son, particular and universal, Shakespearean innovation and generic obligation. Calderwood shows how the final sequence of events fulfills this double requirement, beginning with Hamlet's discovery on board ship of the death-warrant carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and concluding with the double killing of Claudius. The first is a kind of hinge, which culminates Hamlet's self-exploration in the confrontation of his particular, individual death, and initiates the subsuming of his son-identity in the use of his father's royal signet to send his schoolmates to their own deaths; the second in its apparent redundancy acts on Claudius by the envenomed sword that took Hamlet's own personal life as well as by the poisoned drink that revenges for family and state.

Intriguing, original, but perhaps overschematic? I have, of course, had to leave out of this bare-bones summary many of Calderwood's fine variations on the theme; yet the conclusion of this section *does* seem overtidy in its neat parallels. It is not just the final actions against Claudius that sum up self, son, and royal Dane, but the use of his father's signet in his own cause, the definitive announcement in the graveyard—"This is I, Hamlet the Dane"—and the list of charges recited against the King to Horatio, where son, royal Dane, and self each get a line: "He that hath killed my king and whored my mother, / Popped in between the election and my hopes, / Thrown out his angle for my proper life . . ." (5.2.64-66). Yet, if these overdetermined correspondences create an appetite for their opposite—a rage for disorder?—it seems all part of Calderwood's plan. His next two sections invoke linguistic theory and metatheatre to decenter his own structure, rip open his dust-jacket, so to speak—although at this point my metaphor must be abandoned, for the result is not a heap of scraps but a dazzlingly complex web wherein to catch the peculiar mental/theatrical workings of this peculiar play.

All-important here is negation—the unique power of language to enact what is not. Calderwood illustrates with Hamlet's oddly couched answer to Gertrude's "What shall I do?"

Not this, by no means, that I bid thee do:
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,

And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses
 And paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
 Make you to ravel all this matter out . . .

(3.4.188-193)

The words actualize what they deny. Calderwood uses this breakdown of the line between being and not-being as a way into the play's transgressions of barriers and distinctions, concentrating at first on the central transgressions of Claudius—uncle-father, merger of funeral and marriage, poisoner of the ear of Denmark—and on Hamlet's reactions: the silence of what cannot be voiced, the aside or soliloquy as self-silencing utterance, and most centrally the intersection with empty, inflated court speech through quibbles and puns, by which Hamlet speaks to but does not communicate with the confused court. By the negative mode of wordplay, unvoiced speech, and its counterpart in the antic disposition, inactive action, Hamlet seeks to bracket himself off, free from the contaminations of King and court. But in the wantonness of wordplay and madplay, meanings multiply beyond intention, even slyly merge Hamlet with the hated Claudius, while the bracketing even at best allows not a freedom to be himself but only the enunciation of "not-I." Again we move through the graveyard sequence beyond negation to affirmation, though here Calderwood is especially alive to the tragic cost of that move. Translation of the all-capable (because) negative being of Hamlet into active avenger cuts off the richness of the potential selves once held in suspension; and the act of revenge itself contaminates, shaping Hamlet in its own image.

From another angle, fully justified in a play so obsessed with go-betweens and the processes of mediation, Calderwood invites us to consider Hamlet as bearer of the message "revenge" from the Ghost to Claudius, and his complication of that task by truancy as a refusal of mere function, of reduction to self-erasing means. In the third and longest section of his book, Calderwood returns to linguistic theory to probe hero and play in terms of synchronic and diachronic operations of language. The midplay Hamlet of delay and potentials

is like the subject of an as yet unpredicated sentence. He has drawn about him a wealth of self-modifying adjectives, phrases, and clauses that enrich his being and subtilize his character. But all of this substantive ornament is massed and suspended in time until Hamlet commits himself to the transitive verb prescribed by the Ghost. This act of predication, however, will thrust Hamlet into his world and time, into the diachronic current that goes its way indifferent to the irreplaceable "I" and empties at last into a common grave (p. 139).

The play, too, resists this "diachronic suicide" with its interruptions, indirections, ends deferred, possibilities raised and then erased of alternate directions (the Norwegian invasion, the courtship of Hamlet and Ophelia, the Danish rebellion led by Laertes), "insets" of narrative and soliloquy, and presentation of episodes as ends in themselves rather than means in a chain of causality.

Metadrama and deconstruction can become ends in themselves. Calderwood's wonderfully agile intelligence at play occasionally opens him to this charge, but usually they are vehicles to real insight. If, for example, *Hamlet* parades itself as dramatic illusion and thus breaks that illusion, it is not to make the play into the barroom bore described by Terence Eagleton, endlessly talking about its own failure (*Literary Theory: An Introduction* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983], p. 146), but to involve the audience directly in the hero's experience as faith in the ideal surfaces of his world gives way to disillusion. Here, as so often elsewhere, "to be" coexists with "not to be" in the immediacy of theatrical presentation that nevertheless keeps its hold on the audience and allows their participation in the reconstructive movement as well. Calderwood's rich multiplicity keeps returning the reader to Shakespeare's.

To Be and Not to Be is essential reading for students of *Hamlet*. It is also enjoyable reading. Woven into the convincing central argument are any number of more local illuminations: Horatio, Fortinbras, those apparently excrescent child actors that Hamlet discusses with Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, even the named but totally dispensable Claudio who, we are told in 4.7.39, has passed on Hamlet's letters to the King and Queen—all find their places in Calderwood's web, though without any sense of manipulation in service of "the pattern." The endnotes are valuable too, full and discursive in their address to theory and criticism. Calderwood writes lucidly of complicated matters, and his own frequent forays into wordplay, apparent digression, and transgression of normal barriers results not in Claudian corruption of language but in a stimulating, engaging style.

SUSAN SNYDER

The Renaissance 'Hamlet': Issues and Responses in 1600. By Roland Mushat Frye. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. \$28.50.

This important and profusely illustrated book is based on a methodology that laudably attempts to break through twentieth-century preconceptions in order to reveal a more clear view of Shakespeare's intentions and of the reception of *Hamlet* by his contemporaries. Current studies in reception theory have demonstrated how a particular text may be received in very different ways by different audiences and by different historical periods. As Professor Frye indicates, every generation reinterprets tradition "according to its own lights, but we miss much if we do not seek by every means at our disposal to understand what [Shakespeare] wrote within the context of meaning in which his dramatic scene would have been judged by the contemporaries for which he wrote" (p. 220). Thus it is that he takes up especially those aspects of *Hamlet* which involve shifting public attitudes—e.g., ghost lore, royalty and questions of succession, tyranny, marriage to a brother-in-law, funeral practices, and attitudes toward death—that in particular divide our century from the sixteenth. The results of his study are highly rewarding, and indeed his book is one of the most significant studies of any Shakespeare play to be published in recent years.

It is reassuring too to find historical and theological information utilized with tact and understanding. The lamentable story of Mary Queen of Scots is thus drawn upon, not to suggest Shakespeare's dependence on her tragedy in his writing of *Hamlet*, but far more sensibly to illustrate strong public attitudes that would have affected an audience's responses to violations of contemporary conventions of mourning for a deceased spouse and of expectations concerning a woman's re-marriage. Theologians of the time, ranging from Calvinist to Roman Catholic, are likewise drawn upon to show likely audience response, which indeed might range significantly on some issues while on others there could be a surprising unanimity.

The strength of Professor Frye's book derives, however, not only from his reliance on a range of contemporary belief to chart the parameters of opinion concerning various questions, but from his use of iconographic evidence, much of it ignored in most previous scholarship. His focus is on the *visible* exemplified in Shakespeare's imagination, and indeed such a focus is appropriate in treating a dramatist whose work was designed to be *seen* as well as *heard* on the stage of his time. Sensibly, Frye does not attempt to "find one-for-one sources in the world of Shakespeare's time for the events, persons, and ideas in *Hamlet*," but rather to point out "resources Shakespeare could employ as stimuli to

evoke audience response in his creation of a great work of art" (p. 6).

Professor Frye has covered an immense range in his survey of such "resources," though to be sure in treating a topic as complex as *Hamlet* it is inevitable that all questions should not be addressed. Indeed, thus to extend the analysis presented in the book would be to produce a much longer work—i.e., a work far beyond the scope of an already sizeable book. But, for example, the author slips over the important reference to "Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder" (5.1.77) with only a notice that it "brings to mind Claudius' explicit association of himself with Cain as a fratricide" (p. 238). No mention is made, nor does the bibliography list, the article on the subject of the iconography of Cain's weapon by Meyer Schapiro—an article conveniently reprinted in his *Late Antique, Early Christian, and Mediaeval Art* (1979). Further, exploration of Cain as a paradigm for the despairing and damned man—he was, after all, destined to be the first permanent resident in hell—would have led to illumination of the ultimate binary division of the race implied in *Hamlet* and accepted in principle by audiences in Shakespeare's time.

A similar probing of iconographic resonances seems lacking in the treatment of Ophelia in spite of the brilliant analysis which is given to her funeral with its "maimed rites." Such attention to Ophelia not only would have interest because of its connection to certain issues being raised in the best feminist criticism, but also would likewise point to deeply held attitudes concerning femininity that were shared by playwright and spectators. It would hence, for example, be most useful to see some exploration of the submerged Mary Magdalene iconography to which Cherrell Guilfoyle has so wisely called attention in an article in *Comparative Drama* in 1980. Unfortunately, however, neither this article nor Mrs. Guilfoyle's two further articles on *Hamlet* in the same journal are utilized in Professor Frye's study. At other times, paradoxically, Frye's handling of iconography is capable of generalizations that are apt to be slightly misleading, as when he calls attention to an allegedly new emphasis in Renaissance illustrations of the soul at death being taken up into Abraham's bosom or being consigned to hell (p. 273). The "different" iconography seems essentially the same as that which had been immensely popular in the previous century and earlier—e.g., the soul emerging from the body and being saved by an angel in the quasi-dramatic fifteenth-century "Of the Seven Ages" in British Library MS. Add. 37,049, fol. 29^r, or the soul being seized by devils on a twelfth-century tympanum probably from York Minster.

One further criticism of Professor Frye's methodology will question

his occasional reliance on continental iconography when local examples are closer at hand. The mirror as a sign of female vanity (see p. 154), for example, appears on a misericord in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon where Shakespeare was baptised: here the mirror, which has sustained damage, is held by a mermaid, a figure hardly symbolic of temptation to virtuous living. The mirror in this case reflects surface meaning or appearances, which would seem appropriate too in the instance of such a superficial character as Gertrude prior to Hamlet's attempt to make her look behind the surface reflection so that she might see the deformity beneath. But I do not know of an English example that is more useful than a woodcut from the continent to show the way in which the mirror also can after all reveal the deformity beneath the surface: in the Seven Deadly Sins series, formerly attributed to Brueghel, Superbia or Pride gazes into a mirror from which a deformed demon's face is reflected. Such a glass indeed shows "the inmost part," which is in sharp contrast with any semblance of outward beauty.

Another example from the visual arts at Stratford-upon-Avon is, however, much more significant than the one cited above since, in addition to displaying an iconographic type shared by the English public, it also includes images with which Shakespeare as a boy would have been deeply familiar. This example is the wall painting of the Dance of Death in the Guild Chapel at Stratford. Painted in imitation of the series in the cloisters at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, this wall painting contained sixty participants in the dance in which they are arrested by "this fell sergeant, Death," depicted in the conventional form of a cadaver coming to take men and women out of this life into the next. As is well known, in 1563 Shakespeare's father had played a role in the covering of the Guild Chapel wall paintings regarded as controversial from a religious point of view, but the wall paintings depicting the Dance of Death were not affected until after 1576 when they were given notice by the antiquary John Stow. As modern study of these paintings, now fragmentary and behind paneling, has shown (see the report by Wilfrid Puddephat in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* in 1960), they contained the text of Lydgate's *Dance of Death* made famous from the cloisters at St. Paul's, and concluded with a "Dead king eaten by worms," an image that may seem to have considerable significance for *Hamlet* since this royal figure is a precise analogue to the mortality of Alexander, Caesar, and, of course, Claudius, all of whom are subject to such death and decay.

The Renaissance 'Hamlet': Issues and Responses in 1600 is marred by a few minor typographical errors which should be corrected when the

book is reprinted, e.g., "Beverly" (for *Beverley* pp. 272-73), or "W. F. Storch" (for *Willy F. Storck*, pp. 348, 379, 394), but on the whole this is a very well produced book with illustrations that are reproduced with appropriate care. It is a book that all scholars interested in the study of *Hamlet* will be required to know, and it is a book that all will want to own.

CLIFFORD DAVIDSON

Hamlet and the New Poetic: James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, By William H. Quillian. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983. Pp. 171. xvi+171. No price given.

The author tells us in the very first sentence of his book, "My subject is the literary response to *Hamlet* in the 'Heroic Age' of modernism, the decade from 1911 to 1922 when the monuments of . . . the 'new poetic' were being forged" (p.xv). "Prufrock" was composed in 1911, and its protagonist deliberately invites a comparison to his own disadvantage with Shakespeare's Prince. The year 1922 witnessed the appearance of the two great classics of literary modernism, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*—and significantly *Hamlet* figures in both. The intervening years saw the publication of James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and of T.S. Eliot's *Prufrock & Other Observations* and the 1920 volume of *Poems*. They also saw Joyce deliver a series of twelve lectures on "Amletto di G. Shakespeare" at the Università Popolare in Trieste from November 1912 to February 1913, and Eliot publish his essay, "Hamlet and His Problems," in the *Athenaeum* of September 26, 1919.

For studying Joyce's or Eliot's response to Shakespeare we thus have two possible points of focus provided, by their creative writings and by their critical pronouncements, respectively. At first sight, Quillian would seem to cover both, but as a matter of fact he concentrates primarily on the second. In Eliot's case for example, while he does refer to some *Hamlet* echoes in the poems, he shows little interest in Prufrock's negative comparison with the Prince or in the use *The Waste Land* makes of the play. In the case of Joyce the situation at first sight seems different, for Quillian repeatedly quotes Stephen Dedalus's long disquisition on Shakespeare in the National Library scene in *Ulysses*. But the truth is that, in the absence of any script for, or detailed account of, Joyce's 1912-13 lectures, Quillian identifies Stephen's theory about *Hamlet* with Joyce's, and treats it more or less as he does Eliot's 1919 essay. There is no attempt at identifying thematic or stylistic parallels and echoes, and using these as evidence for a richer understanding of Joyce's or Eliot's responses (discursive and intuitive) to Shakespeare. By concentrating solely on the critical pronouncements of his chosen authors on *Hamlet*, Quillian greatly simplifies his task. He thus does not have to ask himself whether the Ghost in *Hamlet* has any bearing on the Lazarus motif in "Prufrock" ("I am Lazarus come from the dead,/Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"), or whether in *The Waste Land* the repetition of Ophelia's words at the close of Section II ("Goodnight ladies, goodnight, sweet ladies"), or the death of Phlebas, like Ophelia's, by drowning in Section IV are chance echoes in Shakespeare or point to a

deeper relationship. Do these works not share something of a common malaise, individual or cultural, in which nothing seems to have meaning? Do we not encounter in them repeatedly a sensuous romanticism which is thwarted, which is drawn to the beautiful only to be compelled to juxtapose it with the repulsive, a frustrated romanticism which in particular is fascinated and repelled by sexual love?

Having set himself a somewhat limited task, Quillian proceeds to discharge it with scholarly competence and adequacy. Chapter I, "*Hamlet Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*," in the course of just thirty pages provides an excellent survey of the subject, covering not only an extensive body of English criticism but the work of Irish, American, German, Danish and French scholars and writers. This review is necessarily selective, but it is quite comprehensive and serves as an indispensable preamble to the discussions which follow. One of the strengths of *Hamlet and the New Poetic* is the fullsome way in which it documents the extent to which both Joyce and Eliot kept up with the Shakespeare criticism being published in their day and the degree to which they based their judgements and opinions on the same.

Another point of interest in Quillian's book is its highlighting of the contrast between Joyce's and Eliot's approaches to Shakespeare. In keeping with the spirit of their generation, both were keen to read Shakespeare in the context of his age, and they were avid students of the books which were being published on Shakespeare's England and on the Elizabethan literary scene. But while Joyce was interested primarily in the relation of Shakespeare the man to his plays, Eliot concerned himself more with problems arising from Shakespeare's adaptation of the work of his predecessors and contemporaries to his own purposes. For information on medieval and Elizabethan England, Joyce relied on such sources as R.S. Rait's *Life in the Medieval University* (1912) and J. Dover Wilson's *Life in Shakespeare's England* (1911); and for data on Shakespeare's life, he turned to Sidney Lee's *A Life of William Shakespeare* (1898) and Frank Harris's *The Man Shakespeare and his Tragic Life Story* (1909). In tracing the autobiographical motif in the plays, Stephen in *Ulysses* is clearly treading in Harris's footsteps. Harris had posited that in the plays, "Shakespeare painted himself at full length, not once but twenty times" (Quillian, p. 20). Assuming that Shakespeare's wife had been unfaithful to him around the time that he lost his father and a son named Hamnet, Stephen speculates on the tradition that Shakespeare played the Ghost in *Hamlet*:

It is possible that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own

words to his own son's name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been prince Hamlet's twin) is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway (Quillian, p. 36).

If Joyce is interested primarily in the archaeological-biographical approach to Shakespeare, Eliot prefers the archaeological-literary. Georg Brandes, Prince Hamlet's distinguished nineteenth-century, compatriot, in his *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study* (English tr. 1898), discussed for the first time *Hamlet's* connection with Saxo Grammaticus and with Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. J.M. Robertson was to give such a concern for seeing a work in relation to its literary sources a wholly new significance in studies such as *Montaigne and Shakespeare* (1909), *The Baconian Heresy* (1913), *Shakespeare and Chapman* (1917) and *The Problem of "Hamlet"* (1919). By seeing each Shakespeare play in the light of its literary sources, Robertson was able to suggest a new way of studying the Shakespearean Canon. This method of concentrating on the literary genealogy of a work rather than on its connection with the author's biography was clearly in harmony with the critical outlook set out in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." (Significantly, the latter appeared in *The Egoist* in two parts in the September-October and November-December numbers for 1919, that is, at virtually the same time as "Hamlet and His Problems.") If there are obscurities in the play, for Robertson they are to be explained not in terms of events in the Bard's life but rather in terms of intractable elements in his literary and dramatic sources:

When then the play falls short of intelligibility in itself, it is at once the economical and necessary course to look for the solution in the conditions imposed by the material. Without the study of these we are very much in the position of the geocentric astronomer, revolving in an incomplete induction. The history of the play alone elucidates the main issue (Quillian, p. 52).

Eliot's famous essay on *Hamlet*, which was originally published as a review of Robertson's book on the play, carries Robertson's method only a step further and on its basis describes as an "artistic failure" a work which until then had been generally regarded as Shakespeare's most assured and most characteristic success.

Besides Robertson's book, the year 1919 saw the publication of Elmer Edgar Stoll's *Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study*. Stoll's

approach was also in line with Eliot's and the author of *The Sacred Wood* made much of it. With the *Athenaeum* essay, "Hamlet and His Problems," the myth of *Hamlet* sustained by the nineteenth century comes full circle. Appropriately, Quillian entitles Chapter 3 as "Mr. Eliot and the 'Disintegration' of *Hamlet*." Its concluding pages constitute a "Coda" (pp. 75-77) in which the author goes on to consider briefly Henry Miller's and Michael Fraenkel's correspondence on *Hamlet* which was published in 1939. Both rejected Eliot's reductive view of the play. They also had little use for the Joycean preoccupation with the autobiographical. They read *Hamlet* on the eve of the outbreak of World War II as pre-eminently a symbolic anticipation of the old age and breakdown of a culture:

A culture continues to develop until it has realized all its life possibilities when it begins to incline to keep awake permanently. We have reached that ultimate condition of sleeplessness which is old age, when there is no more to do, when the spur of action is gone, life is finished, spent . . . Hamlet is a cultural symbol and the fact that he breaks down in the end only serves to heighten the meaning of the symbol—culture itself breaks down in the end, as we know (Quillian, p. 77).

Seeing this vigorous reassertion of the Hamlet myth, Quillian justly concludes: "The question of Hamlet, 'like questions in metaphysics,' can never be finally settled. So deeply has the play entered into the Western literary consciousness, every 'new' interpretation of the play carries with it the echo of past interpretations and the prefiguration of interpretations to come" (p. 77).

The survey of nineteenth century *Hamlet* criticism and the chapters on Joyce and Eliot only account for half of Quillian's book. The other half is taken up by appendices which publish for the first time transcriptions of three Joyce Notebooks (two bound and the third with 60 loose sheets; Quillian includes facsimiles of the bound Notebooks). The bound Notebooks are entitled: "Quaderno di Calligrafia di 'The English Drama'" and "Quaderno di Calligrafia di 'Shakespeare'." We have no script for Joyce's Shakespeare lectures of 1912-13, but we have these Notebooks which are preserved in the Joyce Collection at Cornell University Library. By transcribing them with meticulous care in his book, Quillian has added yet another chapter to the story of the publication of Joyce's Notebooks. In a sense the Appendices represent the most valuable part of Quillian's book for they help to document for the first time with any fullness the response of an important modern writer to

Recto of sixth bound leaf of the notebook labelled *Quaderno di Calligrafia di "The English Drama,"* courtesy of Cornell University Library with permission of The Society of Authors.

Skeleton Drama

Thomas Kyd: "Treachery of Blood".
 This is the original of Hamlet
 plan in a play
 Gammis Treachery: 5 murders 2 suicides:
 Has killed out his tongue, then
 it is the shape of his
 enemy, then cuts his
 own throat

John Lyly: "Court Comedy"
Euphuism, the Anatomy of Wit
 euphuism: ostentation & erudition (Renaissance)
 praise of skeleton: "Mask of Reality"
 in Thomas dramatic prose

Robert Greene: Described his wife, having killed a man, to
 his grey clothes, went to bed, owing money
 to his landlord, drank Rhemish wine &
 ate pickled herring with hash. Death
By the skeleton
 (Shakespeare) "an upstart crow beautiful with
 our feathers that with a tiger's heart
 wrapped in a player's hide supposes
 he is able to bombard out a blank"

Shakespeare. Reading through them, we can see readily the kind of studies and information on the Elizabethan age and on Shakespeare which fascinated Joyce. Thus in the first Notebook (Appendix A) we read the following on Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*:

Hieronomo
original of Hamlet
play in a play

5 murder 2 suicides:
Hero bites out his tongue; throws
it on the stage stab his enemy &
then cuts his own throat

(Quillian, p. 87)

Clearly, Joyce was struck by the crude violence in Kyd and the play-within-a-play device and their connection with Shakespeare. The second Notebook (Appendix B), which covers Shakespeare's life and writings, displays a preponderent, even a disproportionate, interest in the former. The 60 loose notesheets which make up Appendix C, cover various aspects of Elizabethan life which interested Joyce. In the last two pages he quotes Voltaire's notorious dismissal of *Hamlet* as "a rude and barbarous play which would not be tolerated by the vilest rabble in France or Italy," and follows it with Georg Brandes' apostrophe beginning: "But none the less dear to us art thou O Hamlet, and none the less valued and understood by men of today. We love thee like a brother. Thy melancholy is ours, thy wrath is ours . . ." (Quillian, p. 145). Joyce may not have added any marginal comments, but we know full well on which side he stands.

As we come to the end of the Appendices and look at Quillian's book as a whole we are led to ask some basic questions. The title promises a connection between the 'new poetic' that emerged with the modernist movement and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which at no point does the book even attempt to pursue. Quillian's concern is with the critical pronouncements on *Hamlet* of Joyce and Eliot and the contexts of contemporary Shakespeare scholarship on which they rest. He shows little interest in suggesting any connection between *Hamlet* and the creative method of Joyce or of Eliot. In this regard, G. Wilson Knight's studies emphasising spatial form in Shakespeare and, more recently, Zulfikar Ghose's *Hamlet, Prufrock and Language* (1978) are far more pertinent. Quillian's title thus betrays intellectual pretentiousness, raising expectations which he does not mean to fulfil. Once we set aside the reference to the 'new poetic' as irrelevant, we must ask why Eliot has come in for such detailed discussion. Because of the Notebooks, Joyce dominates the book so completely that Quillian would have been better off if he had concentrated on him and brought in Eliot in passing only as a foil.

With some work perhaps on Shakespearean references in Joyce's other writings besides *Ulysses*, he could have given us a *Joyce's Shakespeare* just as we have a *Yeats's Shakespeare* (1971). It would have been then idle to cavil or to complain for, as I have remarked already, within his set limits Quillian is competent and commendably adequate.

American publishers of scholarly books generally maintain a high standard of technical excellence. Quillian's, however, does not quite fill that bill. Oversights in copy-editing and proofreading distract one's attention from time to time. Thus we have: "characters" for "characterises" (p. 21), Tonio Kroger for *Tonio Kroger* (or "Tonio Kroger": p. 26), "Goeth" for "Goethe" (p. 50), "Robertsons" for "Robertson's" (p. 63), "Kahaki Hamlet's" for "Khaki Hamlets" (p. 77), "they suffering" for "thy suffering" (p. 145), "These times" for "These titles" (p. 153) and *Yeat's Shakespeare* for *Yeats's Shakespeare* (p. 163). In addition we have a cross reference on p. 114 to a 'p. 000'—but the appearance of a Printer's Ghost is surely not so out of place in a full-length book on *Hamlet*!

VINOD SENA



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